

**Sermon 23 January 2022** - God's word proclaimed in the law and community. Anointed by the Spirit to bring good news.

**“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” (v18-19)**

Anointed, is a word that is bandied about as something that is exclusive. In some cases, it carries with it the tone that if you are anointed you will not experience hardship. That you will have material wealth. This implies that if you are poor or experiencing suffering or hardship then you are not anointed. When I looked up the meaning of anoint/anointed, it is defined as consecrate, bless, confer (rub or smear with oil)/graciously give (as of a favour or honour). The reason the Spirit of the Lord is upon Jesus is because God has graciously given/blessed him with that honour. The other thing we see from these verses in Luke (v18-19) is that being anointed – receiving God's favour – comes with a responsibility to give and do so that others may also experience God's favour. Anointing is therefore not about personal gain but rather about being made ready to do the task that God has set aside for us to do. The Spirit of the Lord has anointed Jesus for a reason... **“to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” (v18-19)**

So... when we seek anointing – when we say we are anointed – we need to reflect on what we have been, or seek to be, anointed for.

One common theme running through our readings today is community. The readings show different aspects and responses of the community to God's word. They challenge us to make God's word come alive so that we can live lives that make a difference. A difference in, and to, our own lives as well as the lives of others.

The story of Nehemiah takes place after the exile in Babylon is over. The people are poor, demoralized and frightened. They have returned from slavery to face a totally ruined land and a destroyed city. Under the supervision of Ezra and Nehemiah they rebuild the Jerusalem Temple and its walls. In addition to Ezra and Nehemiah help the people to rebuild the moral fibre of the community, encouraging them to rededicate their lives to

God. Today's reading describes how Nehemiah, Ezra and the priests gather the people together to teach and interpret the scriptures for them. We get a sense of how this affected them because we are told that they were moved to tears by God's word. But Ezra, Nehemiah and the priests encourage them to rejoice instead of weeping. They say, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep... Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared... for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (v9-10). Their purpose was not to let the people dwell on their wrongdoing, but to rebuild – revitalize – the people so that they could live according to God's ways. This serves as a reminder to us that once we are convicted by God's word we need to move on and do God's will and live according to God's ways. We need to share God's word and our resources with others in a way that brings new life and hope.

The psalmist also reminds us that God's Word revives (brings to life/ rejuvenates/ awakens) and brings joy. Revives or awakens for what purpose? Each law is meant to re-establish all of creation to its divine purpose. In the same way that God's Word brings life so too should God's Word move us to speaking words of life. The psalm ends with the well known verse – "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer" (19:14) – convicting and challenging us to remember that our words matter. That sometimes our words are an indication of the things we are meditating on in our hearts. Are the words we speak and the things we ponder on acceptable to God? Do they bring life and rejuvenate us, individually, as well as to our families, communities and church?

In the Corinthians reading Paul compares the gathering, the church/community, to a human body. Like a body, Paul says, a community needs both diversity and interdependence. Diversity in that there are many and different parts, doing different things, but all belonging to the body. Each part has a role to play. Interdependence, because each of a body's parts, both the honourable and the less desirable/honourable parts, each part is indispensable – necessary - to the body functioning in a healthy, effective, and pleasant way. Each part/member contributes to the body and receives from the body. Each part affects and influences the other parts. The lesson for us today is that we need to build inclusive communities that "acknowledge", "welcome", "honour" and "affirm" all people and their gifts. No person or gift is more important than another. Comparing ourselves to others is a waste of energy and gifts. Comparing prevents us from fulfilling our ministry/calling. It also robs the community of the blessing of our gifts that God

has anointed us with, through the work of the Holy Spirit. The body of Christ – the church – is a living community upon which God has poured out God’s Spirit. Paul writes, “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit (12:13)...If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it” (12:26). In other words, when we do not “acknowledge”, “welcome”, “honour” and “affirm” others we in fact harm ourselves. Do our words and actions reflect the gracious favour and honour that God has bestowed upon us, the body of Christ.

The Gospel reading begins by telling us that Jesus returned to Galilee “filled with the power of the Spirit” (14:14). He then goes to the synagogue and teaches and is praised by everyone. Then on a particular Sabbath, he goes to the synagogue, as he usually did and reads from “the scroll of the prophet Isaiah”:

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With these words Jesus declares his ministry of justice, mercy and healing. He makes his vocation – his calling - known to all who are present. This is what God has sent him to do – the task he has been anointed for. To bring healing and restoration to all, including those who find themselves on the outside - the blind, the poor, the prisoners, the oppressed. The forgotten and excluded. By proclaiming “the year of the Lord’s favour”, Jesus reminds the people of the concept of the year of jubilee which was supposed to take place every 50 years. This was a concept that was well known to them. It was a time during which debts were forgiven, slaves were set free and family lands restored. A time that wiped the slate clean and put everyone on an equal footing. When Jesus says, **“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (4:21)**, he is saying that this prophecy is about him. He is the one who has come to make the year of the jubilee a reality for everyone. Not just once every 50 years but for all time. And we know this is exactly what he did during his life and ministry and through his death and resurrection.

God has anointed each one of us. Poured out His Spirit upon us and graciously bestowed us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. I pray that we may accept this gracious favour – this anointing - and like Jesus, accept our calling to share God’s word, love and grace. May God’s purpose be fulfilled through us in the world today. Amen