

## Sermon - Jan 23rd - Jesus' Manifesto

1 Corinthians 12 - 31

Luke 4: 14 - 21

You know how it is - you wait weeks for a good reading and then 2 come along at once! Each of these could do with a sermon series on them, so many books about them.

And you'll probably know the one about the body and its many parts - hands up if you've heard sermons on it?

The other one - Luke 4 - is sometimes less well known - hands up if you heard sermons on it? Well you're all going to hear one today!

Luke 4 is known as Jesus manifesto. Luke puts it at the beginning of his gospel - Its the start of Jesus public ministry, - Jesus in the temple, for the first time - and he declares what he's all about, what his purpose is. I have come to

“to proclaim good news to the poor.  
freedom for the prisoners  
recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free”

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And so you have to ask - if that's what Jesus says he's about - does he do it, or does his church do it?

Does he help the poor? Can you remember when he gives out money to anyone - other than Peter's pence? Does he feed the poor - only those 2 picnics - that's not much of a food-bank is it?

What about the prisoners? Jesus do a jailbreak? I don't remember reading about it. He did give a few people their sight back - I'll give him that,

And what would a church look like that took Jesus at his word?

So we do help the poor - the less well off - we give to charity, we support the food bank. But what about freedom for prisoners - we're not setting no convicts free. What about recovery of sight to the blind - do we run an eye clinic, should we take over Specsavers

I bet none of you say - I'm going to church to recover my sight! I wont' need my glasses when I come back!

And how about setting the oppressed free?

Do you try to restructure India and dismantle the caste system that keeps the Dalits downtrodden? Do you go to Dubai and campaign for a fair wage for the all the migrant labour building their pyramids for a pittance?

I mean these things are good - and some of us might support them - but its more of a side interest.

So all I'm trying to say is that maybe Jesus manifesto is not so literal, and is a bit deeper and a bit closer to home.

If this is his spiritual manifesto, then we have to look at it spiritually.

Spiritual poverty, spiritual blindness, emotional oppression, psychological prisons.

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What is spiritual poverty?

*In some ways the rest of Jesus ministry and the bible tells us what it means to be spiritually poor.*

Think about "where your treasure is, there you heart is"  
And all the treasures, and stuff, that we surround ourselves with  
Houses, cars, hoses that that wind themselves up, health insurance -  
None of it is about God.

We live in a world where God is not talked about, or valued, God is written out.  
Think about how much time we spend with God - 1 hour a week, 1 hour a day?  
Or time we spend thinking and pondering the deeper things - other than just "what am I going to get for tea?"  
Or reading the bible or spiritual books?  
Or just to be in communion with God?  
How poor are we?

And yet, when Jesus offered the good news, it wasn't to people who been distracted or overwhelmed with other kinds of riches - it was to people who wanted God - but were told they weren't allowed to come to the temple, or who were made to feel unworthy or excluded. It was not *their* fault they were spiritually poor - just becuase they were a leper, a woman, or a gentile or a tax collector or a sinner. Jesus came to take all those barriers away - and say - good news - you can be spiritually rich!

What about the prisoners?

Perhaps it suggests being held in ways of thinking that do not let you go.

That could be a rigid way of thinking about church or the bible -  
(There is no physical resurrection, the world was made in 6 24 hours periods)  
(Or the church that was "not for black people" or "we don't like children in church")

And the thing about prison is that you didn't choose it, or want it.  
Perhaps its how our parents or school told us it should be.

But now, no matter how you try, you can't see the world differently - and maybe you've given up trying.

But Jesus says - the truth will set you free. And he also says - I am the way, the truth and the life.

Sometimes we resist the truth - we try to hold our version of belief, and it seems heroic - "We found fossils of dinosaurs"

"Someone must have put them there, because I don't believe in them!"

You can laugh, but we all do that. One of the best things I ever learnt is that all truth is God's truth. We should not be scared of the truth, and if it seems in conflict with our faith then we need to dig deeper and wrestle to see what's going on. Maybe ask Jesus to open the door - to set us free!

To be spiritually blind - well one thing is that Jesus said - those who think they can see, are blind! So humility is a key thing! We don't know all the answers, we don't see as clearly as we like to think. To be spiritually blind - all muslims are going in the wrong direction! To write people off as "them". You could say its those who are blind who are keeping some others prisoner.

And lastly the spiritually oppressed - those who are carrying burdens put there by others. Guilt and shame, for things they have already been forgiven. Impossible spiritual demands from leaders. You can't come to church because you're like this. God will never love someone like you. Using the name and fear of God, to control others. Spiritual abuse is now a recognised crime. But sometimes we're just oppressed by our history and baggage.

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So the church is a place where we find  
spiritual riches,  
freedom,  
sight and the  
lifting of burdens.

And you could call those  
teaching and encouragement,  
truth,  
vision,  
love and support

*But here is where Jesus can set us free, he can open our eyes, he can make us rich beyond compare, he can lift our heavy burden.*

But however you say it, that's what we're looking for when we come. And maybe we don't realise it or acknowledge it - maybe its unconscious - or maybe you've just come to the wrong place, you missed the pub and the garage back there.

We come because we know we are poor, imprisoned, blind and oppressed.  
We are broken, empty, scared and alone.  
Church is full of the wounded, looking for a doctor.

We come to church because we're broken, lost, afraid.  
Because we want to change.  
We know we need God and one another.  
But.. we're afraid.  
What will they say if they know?  
Because we're ashamed of our brokenness and we don't want to be vulnerable.  
Because we need to protect ourselves from some of the other broken people.  
We put on our mask, our happy face, our defence.  
"I'm fine!" "Yeah, it's all good, how about you?"

*And worse, sometimes it comes across like "I'm perfect. I go to church"*  
*People outside say -*

"I can't go to church, I'm not good enough!"  
And we should be saying -  
Mate - that's exactly the qualification we're looking for!

And the sad thing is - that once we put that mask on  
- God can't really do much  
*He can only work with what you give him*  
*If you come saying you need no help - then you'll get none.*  
and there was no point us coming anyway.

Because the reason to come to church - is to meet with God.  
Sometimes directly - but sometimes through his body - the church - one another.

And there is yet a deeper miracle.  
That God chooses to use us!  
His body - the church - a community of wounded healers - limping along, helping each other to stand.  
We are the body, - broken  
and only when the body is broken, can it be shared.  
And we take Christ out - scattered like crumbs - to feeding a world that needs to hear good news, freedom, sight!

And in all this -

Christ is our hope our future - when we are broken, lost, afraid,  
He is the one who can heal, and free us, lift us up, and hold the pieces.