

More Good News

Luke 4:16-21

‘When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “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.” ..Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”’

Begin by reading this passage in its wider context, as it appears in Isaiah 60 and 61. These 2 chapters speak of the hope and confidence which a shattered nation is to have in its future. The writer speaks of ‘buildings long in ruins being rebuilt’. He exhorts Jerusalem to ‘rise and shine’. He describes God’s people as ‘no longer deserted’ and that ‘no longer will the sound of violence be heard in (their) land’.

Those listening to Jesus would have been very familiar with the words of Isaiah. What would they have felt about Jesus on hearing him declare himself as the one who would ‘announce good news to the poor’ (Note in Isaiah the word for ‘poor’ is ‘humble’)?

What was the good news?

Who were the poor?

In our own times, who are the poor and humble?

Are there any places or people who would welcome hearing these words?

For us, living in a western modernised and mechanised world, ideas of hope, rebuilding and good news take on other meanings. The words convey meaning for society and Church as well as for the individual.

What does the ‘good news’ mean in these other contexts?

What do we need to be liberated from in the society in which we live?

Jesus would have understood the needs, hopes and hidden aspirations of every person listening to him, as well as those of the wider community.

How are we, as ambassadors for Christ, to connect with, or understand, the needs and aspirations of others?

What might 'recovery of sight' mean, apart from restoring to a person their physical sight?

In what sense are we called to enter into the work of 'releasing prisoners'?

Of 'letting the broken victims go free'?

The work of Lent is very much about entering into the work of Christ. This involves the spiritual as well as the practical.

What does this passage tell us about the meaning of 'salvation' for our world and society?

The last set of questions are explored more fully in 'Making Sense of God's Love – Atonement and Redemption' SPCK (2011)

In the one Spirit – Conflict in the Church