**Sermon Third Sunday after Epiphany 23 January 2022**

**Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10, Psalm 19, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Luke 4:14-21**

Jesus is seated in the Synagogue in his home village, his home town of Nazareth, he stands to take the scroll and begins reading the passage from Isaiah 61:verse 1, ‘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’. Jesus rolls the scroll back up, hands it to the attendant and sits back down. Its quite an evocative image, Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth with the local people, indeed his family are possibly there, his father and brothers. Jesus went to the synagogue ‘as was his custom’ on the sabbath. Just as it is for us to come to church each Sunday, Jesus went to the synagogue every sabbath. No matter what town he was in, this was what Jesus did, and on this particular day Jesus is in Nazareth.

Why does it matter? If we go back to the beginning of Luke chapter 4, Jesus full of the Holy Spirit went into the desert after his baptism by John. There he was tempted by the devil for ‘forty days’. Let us not skip over this point. Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit went into the desert. After Jesus temptation, Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee and in verse14 and 15 of chapter 45 we discover that ‘Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returns to Galilee and the community begin to spread news of Jesus throughout the surrounding region. It is in Galilee that Jesus begins to teach in the Synagogues and his name begins to be known. It is after this that Jesus comes to the Synagogue in Nazareth, to his home town, and reads from the prophet Isaiah, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me’. Already we note that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism, he goes into the Wilderness full of the Holy Spirit, and again, filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus enters Galilee to preach in the Synagogues there. For Jesus to read the words of Isaiah and say these words of himself, were, in fact, true. ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me’, why, ‘because he, because God had ‘anointed him to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to make the blind to see, and let the oppressed go free’ (Luke 4:18,19).

But I might still hear you ask but why does any of this matter? It matters because Jesus in the presence of those known to him, his family, friends and neighbours were there present to hear him declare that the words spoken of the prophet Isaiah were fulfilled in him on that day. That is no small claim. Jesus invoking Isaiah would have had every ear in that place pinned to every word he spoke and we know that they were indeed paying attention. If we read further on from our gospel reading we discover that those gathered in the synagogue ‘all spoke well of him and were amazed’ (Luke 4:22). Some questioned, ‘Is this not Joseph’s son?’ (Luke 4:22b) Clearly they were puzzled.

What can we take away from here? I believe that in Jesus, God keeps his promises. Jesus at his baptism received the Holy Spirit, he was thrust out into the wilderness, full of the Holy Spirit and begins his ministry full of the Holy Spirit. And so for Jesus to read the words of Isaiah were also a part of God’s plan for Jesus, that in that day those words of Isaiah were indeed fulfilled.

My hope is that each of us can also see that God has also given us of his Holy Spirit to all who are baptised. God has endowed each one of us with gifts for the building up of the church. Already I have seen many gifts that are among this congregation and I’m guessing that I am yet to discover more. Gifts of hospitality, of service, reading, prayer, encouragement, gifts of music and singing. What is God calling you to this year. Even as some of us get older, we may wonder if God can still work through us, and I would boldly declare Yes! God works in our lives from our earliest days to our last. What gifts are you yet still to discover or perhaps there are gifts that have laid dormant for many years. What might God be asking of you to take up once more?

But I wonder too, what stops us believing that God has a place for your God given talents and abilities in the church and in the community? What prevents us from taking up our place? Perhaps it might seem to big, too challenging, too much. Or perhaps the thought might be, why would God bother with me, why would God be interested in what I can offer him. Perhaps it might be that it is easier to put up a barrier between ourselves and God. Perhaps it might be the right time to stop, listen for what God is saying to your hearts and simply trust.

God took Jesus, the son of a carpenter, born in Bethlehem, a small village in the middle of nowhere to become the Son of God, the Messiah, and on that day reading from the prophet Isaiah accepted that which God had called him too, knowing that he was empowered by the Holy Spirit to fully embrace all that he was called to do. The invitation today is one of transformation in our lives. If you need proof of God’s plan in your life, take a moment this week to take a look back and see where God has guided you, the funny moments, the life changing moments, the times of grief and pain, the times of joy and surprise. All these moments when God came in and changed your direction. Can you imagine then what God can do with you for the body of Christ. A growing and dynamic healthy church that is willing to listen to where God is guiding and leading. God’s plan for Jesus culminated in the promises of God through Isaiah and read out by Jesus in the synagogue in the presence of his people were fulfilled. May we trust in God’s leading in each of our lives for the benefit of the body of Christ and the community in which we live.