

## Worship at Home Sunday 30 January

**Welcome** to Worship at Home for Sunday 30 January.

**Invitation to Worship** Sing to God, O peoples of the earth. Proclaim the power of the Lord. The Lord our God gives us power and strength.

**Prayer** You, Lord, do give us strength. You give us strength in our bodies, and even as we age and bodies become weaker, you give us enduring spiritual strength. So we rest in you, giving ourselves in confidence to the embrace of your love. **Amen**

**Reading** Our reading this time is from Luke's Gospel, chapter 4, verses 16-30.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked. Jesus said to them, 'Surely you will quote this proverb to me: "Physician, heal yourself!" And you will tell me, "Do here in your home town what we have heard that you did in Capernaum."' 'Truly I tell you,' he continued, 'no prophet is accepted in his home town. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed – only Naaman the Syrian.'

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

### Reflection

That's a good reading, but perhaps more challenging than you realise at first reading. Of course, the Nazareth congregation were wrong to react to Jesus' sermon in the way they did, but let's look more closely. Picture the scene. There was this visiting preacher, a native of their town and they were hearing such good things about him. His growing reputation was putting their town on the map! So they were settling down to hear a comforting reassuring sermon.

Jesus read the passage, and then commented, 'Today, this bible passage has been fulfilled at this very moment.' Good stuff, and then the disturbing bit came. 'You know your Bible, 'said Jesus, 'But what do you make of this? In the days of Elijah, there were plenty of widows here at home in Israel, but God sent Elijah on a special mission to a foreign widow, in Sidon. And in days of Elisha, God sent him on a special mission to cure a foreign general of his leprosy, despite the fact that there were plenty of people here at home in Israel with the disease. So, you see, you are not the special nation loved by God to the exclusion of everyone else.'

Oh dear, they did not like that! And there was a negative reaction. But, obviously to us, they were wrong. It is so clear...

And what of us? What do we expect of our preachers Sunday by Sunday? Nice comforting, reassuring sermons that make us feel that we are better than other people, like, possibly... people who don't come to church, who are busy doing their shopping, people sitting in the street begging, or people with extreme political beliefs, people of different sexuality, people who are in debt, people in

prison, and so on and so on. The challenge to us is not to expect our preachers to confirm our prejudices, but to broaden our horizons to include concern and love for all people everywhere. 'For all, for all, my Saviour died, for all, for all was crucified.'

And there's a further, secondary challenge too, for those of us who do preach. We try to unpack the Bible, bring out its true meaning for our hearers. And don't we all sometimes ask ourselves, 'Do I dare say this to next Sunday's congregation. Won't they find it too upsetting?' But perhaps we ought to be upsetting them...

We come to **our hymn**, in Singing the Faith, number 404, God's Spirit is in my heart.

God's Spirit is in my heart,  
He has called me and set me apart.  
This is what I have to do,  
what I have to do.

*He sent me to give the Good News to the poor  
Tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more  
Tell blind people that they can see  
And set the down trodden free  
And go tell everyone the news that the  
Kingdom of God has come  
And go tell everyone  
The news That God's Kingdom has come.*

Just as the Father sent me  
So I'm sending you out to be,  
My witnesses throughout the world,  
the whole of the world.

*He sent me to give the Good News to the poor*

Don't carry a load in your pack,  
You don't need two shirts on your back  
A workman can earn his own keep,  
can earn his own keep.

*He sent me to give the Good News to the poor*

Don't worry what you have to say,  
don't worry because on that day  
God's Spirit will speak in your heart  
Will speak in your heart.

*He sent me to give the Good News to the poor*

### **Prayers of intercession.**

Lord, we think of the places on earth having to deal with natural disasters. We pray particularly for Tonga dealing with the aftermath of the underwater volcanic eruption. Give strength and determination and resilience to those affected and all those doing what they can from neighbouring lands. And we pray for the people of Afghanistan, facing food shortages Be with all who respond to the appeal for disaster relief.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, we also think of all those having to learn to live with climate change, rising temperatures, rising sea levels, decreasing rainfall or too much rain. Again we pray for wisdom and strength for governments as they deal with climate change.

Lord, in you mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, help us all to tread gently on the earth, not wasting resources, not contributing unnecessarily to climate change. Help us all to be faithful stewards of the earth.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

And Lord, as COVID restrictions ease, give the government wisdom. Give wisdom to church leaders, and a sense of responsibility to us all as we delight in our increasing freedoms.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, we pray for wisdom for Christ Church members, as we gather in our Annual Meeting today. Give guidance to our continuing and elected elders as they care for our church life.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Finally, we pray for all those we know who need our prayers particularly at this time: the ill, the bereaved, people supporting others through difficult times. We name them before you in the silence... [Pause]... Give them your comfort and peace.

Lord, we thank you that you hear our prayers, and answer them according to your perfect will. **Amen.**

**The blessing** of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all. **Amen**

*Revd Tony Coates*