

## Sermon 26 January 2025

### Philippians 4:4-9 Luke 4:14-21

Jesus's ministry was getting under way. He comes to Galilee from his time in the desert, where he fasted in preparation for his ministry and where he underwent a time of temptation from the devil himself. Luke tells us that he travelled around the country teaching in synagogues.

The synagogue was the real centre of religious life in Palestine. Just as in Christian countries, you will find a church in every town and village, so it was with synagogues. Teaching was an important part of the worship, and so here we have Jesus doing just that. He quotes from a passage in Isaiah and then comes out with that rather mind-blowing statement, *'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'*

To say that the people were amazed that someone from their midst could make such a claim would be a complete understatement. They just couldn't believe what they were hearing. They were also very angry that someone was making this claim and a few verses later recounts how they attempted to push him off the edge of a cliff. Today I want to focus on that Isaiah passage itself, and I want to focus on two aspects.

Firstly, this passage is about the coming of the Messiah, and these particular verses speak of a Messiah who will bring 'good news for the poor.' Now this is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, once again we have Jesus making a statement about just who he is – the Messiah. To his listeners, this was blasphemous, this was unthinkable.

And secondly, this Messiah who will bring 'good news for the poor' is not the sort of Messiah the Jewish people were hoping for. I alluded to this two weeks ago. The Jewish people were looking for a warrior-type of Messiah who would lead their nation to victory over their many enemies. They were looking for a Messiah of vengeance, not grace. So, it is no wonder the people were upset and wanted to inflict a degree of pain and suffering on Jesus.

The other aspect I want to highlight is this – this passage is really about the coming of God's kingdom. After all, surely the coming of the Messiah and the coming of God's kingdom should, by definition, go hand in hand. Let us remind ourselves that God's kingdom is a society where we live in harmony with one another and, most importantly, with God. By accepting Jesus as the Messiah, we accept the challenge of living our lives in accordance with God's will, of living lives of grace, kindness and compassion.

Walter Rauschenbusch, American theologian and lecturer, wrote, *'The Kingdom of God is not a matter of getting individuals to heaven, but of transferring our life on earth into the harmony of heaven.'*

In our first reading from Philippians, Paul writes, *'...whatever is honourable, just, pure, pleasing and commendable.'* He urges us to *'keep on doing these things.'* In the end, God's kingdom is generated by you and me carrying out small acts of kindness. If we can all do this, then a community of grace can be created. And that, my friends, is simply God's kingdom.

I remind you of the story of the truckie who was travelling through North Carolina when a brown sedan merged on to the highway in front of him. It weaved back and forth between the lanes, causing the truckie to shift into a lower gear. At first, he thought the driver was drunk, but when he came closer he saw an elderly man shaking uncontrollably behind the wheel. He noticed a Citizen's Band aerial

attached to the car, so he called on the radio, 'You in the brown Chevy, if you can hear me, pull over. Pull off the road.'

Amazingly, he did. The truckie pulled up behind the car and climbed from his cab. The elderly man staggered from his car and fell into the truckie's arms. He poured out a story of months of fear and pain because of the illness of his daughter, his only child. Now he was returning from the hospital where it was decided that she would cease any further treatment. In the hospital he remained strong and stoic for his daughter, but on the road he fell apart.

The two men talked for the good part of an hour and then the father decided he was ok to continue driving. The men embraced and the truckie followed him for 40 kilometres. As they drove along, the two men talked together on the radio.

The older man finally acknowledged that his exit was ahead and thanked his new friend again for his help. The truckie asked if he could make it home alright and suddenly a third voice broke in on the conversation, 'Breaker 19, don't worry, good buddy. Go your way. I'll see him home.' Glancing in his rear vision mirror, he saw a large livestock truck move into the exit lane behind the brown chevy.

The truckie was special, not because of his status in the world, but simply because of his kindness and decency. We can all be like him. That's how we create God's kingdom here on earth, here in our community. If enough people can come to a faith in Christ, and most importantly, live out that faith through kindness and service to their fellow human beings, then we can do honour and justice to Christ as the embodiment of God here on earth. In other words, we can rightly claim Jesus as the Messiah through our deeds and actions, and not just through words.

As Jonathan Edwards, American preacher and philosopher, said, '*The seeking of the kingdom of God is the chief business of the Christian life.*'