

Leigh Memorial Uniting Church

Comments and Questions for Reflection in preparation for Sunday 23/1/22

Luke 4:14-21

This week's Gospel reading comes from Luke 4:14-21. It is the inaugural sermon of Jesus in Luke's story – his mission statement if you like. Jesus read some verses from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1-2 with some words from Is 58). Jesus said: *"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."*

The Jewish conception of poverty, it isn't only economic. New Testament commentator, Joel Green defines "poor" in the first-century Mediterranean world: *"In that culture, one's status in a community was not so much a function of economic realities, but depended on a number of elements, including education, gender, family heritage, religious purity, vocation, economics, and so on. Thus, lack of subsistence might account for one's designation as "poor," but so might other disadvantaged conditions, and "poor" would serve as a cipher for those of low status, for those excluded according to normal canons of status honour in the Mediterranean world."*

Poverty is material/economic but also spiritual, psychological and physical. The poverty for which Jesus promises 'good news' is not just economic but also the poverty of oppression where people are held captive. This could be political, religious, economic, health, psychological, addiction – anything that oppresses people and holds them captive. For many in the wealthy West it could affluence and materialism. Jesus' message and mission is about an alternative that delivers freedom and life rather than ongoing bondage. There are captives and prisoners that Jesus refers to and he speaks of release from the social, spiritual and economic factors that bind people and hold them captive.

In our world, ~9% of people live in extreme poverty – insufficient access to food, shelter, education, medical support... For many others there is relative poverty, and the levels vary between nations. It costs considerably more to live with basic needs met in some countries compared to others. Never-the-less, Australians, for the most part are in the top 20% of the world and have access to far more than we need. Other nearby nations have far too little (e.g., access to COVID vaccines and other basic medicines, food, clean water, shelter, education...).

- How do you hear Jesus' words?
- What do they lead you to think about?
- Do these words suggest people, situations, communities into your mind?
- Who do think of when you read Jesus' words?
- How do you feel/respond to these images?

In our nation there are many people oppressed by addiction, expectation, debt, violence, anxiety, fear, grief, guilt...

- What might Jesus' words and the church's ministry say to these people – what is it they need and what might we offer?
- Are Jesus' words, *only words*? (e.g., What does good news to a hungry person look like?)?

Jesus' words are addressed to a community of people about how we generously care for and support one another and those beyond our family/group/community or nation.

- What does this mean for the church?
- How do we proclaim good news, proclaim freedom, release for captives, opened eyes and the Year of the Lord's Favour (the well-being of all people and creation)?
- How do we proclaim these things in words and our actions? What can we do, now?