

A Kingdom for All — 2

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor
4th Sunday after the Epiphany—31st January 2016
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Luke 4.21-30

Introduction

Have any of you had the misfortune to be part of the family reunion from hell? Maybe at Christmas time or a baptism? Maybe a dinner party that started out well and degenerated the further the night went on?

You know the scenario. It all starts well. People agree that the children look lovely, that everyone is looking well even if some of it is surgical but slowly the underlying tensions emerge. And if you don't see it coming you find yourself utterly puzzled by it all.

That's what happens in today's story. And it all begins with Jesus talking about the scripture he has just read describing what kind of messiah he might be. Let me briefly reiterate those ideas.

What kind of messiah would Jesus be?

The question of what kind of messiahship Jesus was offering was critical. There was no one view about what a messiah should do or even if there would be one. But at least we have some evidence as to how some people were reading their bibles (Old Testament texts) and interpreting them around about the time of Herod the Great and the birth of Jesus.

Here is one example from the *Psalms of Solomon* 17.21-30 (Wright p.311) speaking of the expected king. We don't know how widespread such articulate views were among ordinary people, but like all ideas they were no doubt part of the mix of ancient Judaism even at village level.

22 And gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers, and that he may purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample (her) down to destruction. 23 Wisely, righteously he shall thrust out sinners from (the) inheritance; he shall destroy the arrogance of the sinner as a potter's jar. 24 With a rod of iron he shall shatter all their substance; he shall destroy the godless nations with the word of his mouth. 25 At his rebuke nations shall flee before him, and he shall reprove sinners for the thoughts of their heart. 26 And he shall gather together a holy people, whom he shall lead in righteousness, and he shall judge the tribes of the people who has been made holy by the Lord his God. 27 And he shall not suffer unrighteousness to lodge any more in their midst, nor shall there dwell with them any man who knows wickedness, for he shall know them, that they are all sons of their God. 28 And he shall divide them according to their tribes upon the land, and neither sojourner nor alien shall dwell with them any more. 29 He shall judge peoples and nations in the wisdom of his righteousness. Selah. 30 And he shall have the gentile nations to serve him under his yoke; and he shall glorify the Lord in a place prominent (above) all the earth. And he shall purge Jerusalem, making it holy as of old.

Now compare that to Jesus' proclamation about himself which we read last week.

'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 differences are quite clear. Gone are the references to violent overthrow of the gentiles and their destruction. Gone are the references to an enclosed holy community. In their place are references to the anointing of the Spirit. Jesus ministry of the kingdom is a prophetic

ministry. It is not a ministry of destruction and violence or vengeance. It is a Spirit ministry. The Spirit has come on Jesus at the beginning of his mission just as the Spirit will come on the church in Acts. The church is the Spirit prophetic continuation of Jesus mission. That is Luke's point.

What would be the character of his ministry and mission?

He will tell of good news for the poor the captives, the blind and the oppressed. The rest of the story illustrates exactly what this means. People are set free, people are healed, and people are taught so that they can find the freedom of the Spirit in serving the rule of God's justice and love. All of Luke's stories have this passage in mind. The Spirit is at work thus God's rule is happening. The program of vss. 1819 tells us the meaning of the stories.

We can see that Jesus program is not about political or economic reform. The problem with all such is that ideology drives them.

Jesus is relational. People are the key. That is what a Spirit ministry means. It is the outcast of the people who will benefit. Change is not about political opinion or economic ideology. Change is deeply relational.

It is not that the political or economic are unimportant. The problem is that ideas ride roughshod over the least in the community, the invisible, and the lost. The Spirit never loses sight of any of those but ideology does.

Now one would think that all this would enthrall people, entrance them especially as Jesus in his ministry actually sets people free in healings or exorcisms or teaching. But such activity does not guarantee any such thing. And we come back to a theme that again is critical to Luke and will be there running in the background the theme of rejection.

The continuing theme of rejection

When Jesus parents presented Jesus in the Temple not long after his birth Simeon an ancient prophet spoke of Jesus' ministry in terms well known to Anglicans:

'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

But he also went on to say much more disconcertingly:

'Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Jesus is among his own people and we know that some spoke well of him and what he has been doing and saying has caused some amazement.

Nazareth was a small town of some 400-500 people and here are some of them in the synagogue and at the cuppa afterwards. This was a boy they knew but that is not the main cause of trouble in Luke's story.

Jesus also makes the point that he cannot work in their town. Not much is made of that but it is no doubt as in the other accounts that his neighbours simply could not trust the local lad. They knew him so they did not have to believe what he said was required of them. A few magic tricks would do for them. Put away the silly prophetic stuff, boy, and show us your ricks.

Jesus also then makes the point the prophets in Israel were, generally speaking, not honoured thus emphasizing that he was prophet not magic worker. Even then that is not the point where the situation turns murderous.

So why does it all turn sour?

The reason for the rejection

The problem comes with Jesus' use of Elijah and Elisha as patterns for his understanding of the rule of God and the Spirit's work. He takes two well-known stories from Israel's bible, its identity making document and he expounds them in a way that offends all their sensibilities. Remember we read earlier from the *Psalms of Solomon* about messianic expectations. We learnt that the purity of Israel and the separation and subjugation of the gentiles are key pictures in the imaginations of many of Jesus' hearers. Jesus tells them that according to the prophetic tradition God works outside the geographical and cultural barriers of Israel.

We the readers know that is God's purpose because Simeon has said of the infant that he is a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

Here is the ministry's public declaration 30 years later with its historical and theological justification. Elijah and Elisha went outside Israel at the command of God and at times of crisis. That is Jesus' ministry, that is the Spirit' work, that is the purpose of God's rule. The prophet is for all and not just for them. The Spirit is for all and not just for them. The release and freedom is for all and not just for them. That has been God's revelation in the prophetic tradition in Israel and God will continue in Jesus and the church that prophetic tradition.

It is all too shattering. Rage is the response, not joy and gladness.

So they take the way they know best; remove the dirt from their midst. Stone Jesus.

I want you to notice the last verse; "But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way." We do not know any details of how Jesus worked his way out of this. We know that he did because he had a Spirit mission to accomplish. He was guided neither by fear nor foolishness but the pursuit of the mission of the Spirit. Timing he left to God.

Conclusion

The Spirit's ministry and mission remains exactly the same for the church. And sometimes we too find that shattering. It may require of us great change just as it did ancient Israel. We may face the rage of our neighbours. We simply must pass through it to pursue the Spirit mission.

This passage exposes the heart of Jesus. It manifests the Spirit's agenda. It therefore must be our agenda. That is the only good news we have on offer. In Jesus everything has changed. Can we be a prophetic people, not giving bland advice to governments as some think prophetic means, but following Jesus' agenda to release, to set free in all we do and say?