

## Fourth Sunday after Epiphany 2022

Jeremiah 1:4-10, 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Luke 4:21-30

Today's gospel began with the same words that ended last week's reading: Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' In last Sunday's reading Jesus went to the Synagogue, as was his custom, and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. The passage he read was a short excerpt from Isaiah chapter 61. It is met with amazement by his fellow townsfolk, his words they say 'are filled with grace.' Jesus it would seem has deliberately omitted the part of the reading that deals with God's judgement or vengeance, he has re framed God and this is a new revelation and the people are amazed. But Jesus knows they will want to confine him and his message, but just like Jeremiah he is not just the local lad, made good. Jesus brings a new way of thinking about God that is for all, it is a universal message. He is a prophet in the same line as Isaiah and Jeremiah, yes, but unlike them *he* will bear the burden of this ministry in a new way, a way that draws *all* people into the orbit of God's love, this meets with resistance, and this resistance to this inclusive message begins at home.

Over the New Year period whilst we were in Melbourne, we became aware that we might have inadvertently become a close contact of someone who knew someone whose partner's mother had possibly been a close contact. Naturally we were concerned; so we stocked up with all the necessities, beer, books, podcasts, more beer, settled down poolside, and monitored for symptoms! It was tough! In the evening we watched movies – 'Don't look up' is one that I recall, it was clever, funny and little disconcerting; I won't say anymore.

Being on holiday is a strange thing because the habits, the duties of prayer don't stop, they are simply given a different context. Reading scriptures becomes more leisurely, perhaps as it should be. I find that I read differently, I'm not reading for preaching – as is often the case, but for prayer. This changes too, a holiday gives your prayer a different context. Rather than concerns for people, sick lists, parish concerns etc, my prayer was more meditative, contemplative; sometimes I did indeed doze off. Why am I telling you this? Well while I was away, I decided to read through Luke and Acts as one book and to try and do so as literature rather than sacred text and see how that changed my understanding. It was more difficult than I thought; and transitioning between the two books was far from seamless, Luke ends and Acts begins with the account of the Ascension, it seems that the ascension acts as kind of hinge. In Acts we read of the two men in white robes who say to the disciples as they peer into the heavens 'don't look up!' It struck me that this is mantra that could apply to this great work.

In the midst of this reading and watching movies I read some poetry and quite coincidentally read from RS Thomas this poem called, The Cast

The Cast

'Look up' they said

At the rehearsal  
of the film. 'Higher, higher' –  
(preparing for the monster)  
and the screaming began  
the nightmare  
from which there is no waking.  
Ah, vertical God,  
whose altitudes are the mathematics  
that confound us,  
What is thought but the mind's  
scream as it hurtles  
in free fall down your immense  
side, hurrying everywhere,  
arriving nowhere but at the precipitousness  
of your presence?  
We weigh  
nothing. Is it that you assess  
us by our ability,  
upside down as we are,  
to look forward to averages  
that you have left behind?

The message of Luke and Acts is one of acceptance; don't look up to this vertical God, whose altitudes are the mathematics that confound us and who assesses us by our abilities. No don't look up look, around you first. The two volumes written by Luke are about this gathering of peoples, think of Samaritans in Luke and think of the Pentecost event in Acts, just two examples of the extraordinary inclusive project of the God presented in these books. This project of God is the great theme of these books.

It is story of the God who we are called to model in the 'love is' section in Paul's reading. The God who is patient; kind; not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Not insisting on his own way; and not irritable or resentful; the God who does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. The God who bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. This was the kind of God that Jesus spoke about in Nazareth, no wonder his fellow Nazoreans were amazed, but in their desire to keep the local boy to themselves they failed to understand the message of this new re framed God and they failed to see that God before their very eyes because they looked up and the message of the one before them was 'look around you.'

This is the God we worship, the God who in Christ, calls us to follow him. Whilst this is the great challenge of Christian life there is also the great comfort of knowing that we are fully known by this God, whom we can see only dimly – in the fullness of time *'I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.'* In the meantime however our call is don't look up, look around you. Amen.