



Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Third Sunday of Epiphany

Readings: [Nehemiah 8.1-3, 5-6, 8-10](#); [I Corinthians 12.12-31a](#); [Luke 4.14-21](#)

26 January 2025

One of the most repeated refrains in scripture is 'Do not be afraid,' which is generally followed by the assertion that the reason we are not to be afraid is that God is with his people. Today, we can assert from our Gospel reading that God is no longer just with one particular group (Israel) but with the whole of humanity, extending the offer of his great salvation and pushing the boundaries of the Kingdom of God to more and more people.

As Jesus unfolds and reads from Isaiah 61—the words initially spoken by Isaiah to the exiled Jews in Babylon—He now speaks in the Roman province of Galilee. Derby is a diverse community, and our Cathedral community is increasingly so, for which we thank God. As we embrace that diversity and our discipleship in Christ, we would do well to approach scriptures as familiar to us as the prophet's words were to the Jews listening to Jesus, hearing them from the perspective of communities other than our own. Recently, in my own prayer life, I have been contemplating how I can break free from my echo chambers and view familiar concepts from a fresh angle. Practical theologian Zoe Bennet refers to this as dancing around the hexagon, examining familiar comforts, issues, and challenges from different perspectives.

And if you want an illustration of what I'm talking about we only have to look at this week's news to the Rt Revd Mariann Edgar Budde, who, shortly after his inauguration, urged President Trump to "in the name of God... have mercy on the people of our country who are scared now."¹ In our Old Testament reading, where the prophet Ezra takes and reads the Torah in the public square, and in our Gospel, where Jesus reads the words of Isaiah in the Synagogue, we see sacred scripture calling for a proper and godly order of society and our relationships. Our faith is not a private matter that we practice in private; we must carry the life of society, transforming the revelation of faith into public life.

As society fragments and corporate and political life can seem dehumanising and distant from a concern for the common good, you and I, as Christians, are called not to be afraid. We are called to be a people with a hopeful and prophetic story, people who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, can be agents of renewal. People who embrace the diversity of our communities can embrace our interconnectedness.

And there's a glorious Epiphany journey at play as we engage with these scriptures today and as we journey through this Epiphany season. On the Feast of the Epiphany we celebrated the coming of the Wise Men or Magi to the stable where Jesus was born: a long and arduous journey but one motivated by the recognition of the Magi, that there was something in the Incarnation of Jesus that was just as meaningful for the whole of humanity as it was for the Jews. At the Baptism of Jesus, the same spirit who descended on Jesus as a dove is the same Spirit who reveals God to us and empowers us for mission. At the wedding banquet in Cana of Galilee, we see a sign of God's abundant generosity rather than scarcity. And, in the Conversion of St Paul, we see a violent hater

of Christians encounter the life and love of Jesus: what the priest and poet Malcom Guite calls 'Loving the violent into light'. Do you see concern for the other, abundant generosity, and the embrace of difficult people at the centre of civic life? Do you see them at the centre of our spiritual lives? I'll that reflection to your prayers.

There's a phrase attributed to St Augustine: 'New is in the Old concealed, the Old is in the New revealed. In our passage from Luke 4 we see Jesus's assert (v21) 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'. Jesus is the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 61; in Jesus, we see the old prophecies revealed and imagery of a restored creation where justice and relationships flourish. These are the acts of creation we read about:

- To bring good news for the poor.
- To comfort the broken-hearted.
- Release for those held captive
- To tell those mourning that God's favour has come.
- To those mourning in Israel a crown of beauty for ashes – remember that Isaiah is writing to those help in captivity.
- Blessing instead of mourning
- Great Oaks planted for the Lord's glory.

What Isaiah prophesies about and what Jesus proclaims from Isaiah in the Synagogue is an image of God's character as one of goodness and blessing. It's also a statement that the Lord does not and will not abandon his people to broken relationships, violence and injustice. And Jesus, 700 years after Isaiah, declares himself to be the fulfilment of these words. In Jesus, people exposed to poverty, pain, grief, captivity, etc, rediscover dignity as God does his work of restoring creation and our society.

As we begin to work out what these scriptures and the reflections, I've offered mean for us in the particular places where God has called us to be his people, I want to read you a few sentences from the book 'The Day the Revolution Began' by N.T. Wright:

What the bible offers is not a 'works contract' but a covenant of vocation. The vocation in question is that of being a genuine human being, with genuinely human tasks to perform as part of the Creator's purpose for His world. The main task of this vocation is 'image-bearing,' reflecting the Creator's wise stewardship into the world and reflecting the praises of all creation back to its maker. Those who do so are the Royal Priesthood, the Kingdom of Priests, the people who are called to stand at the dangerous and exhilarating point where heaven and earth meet. ²

God of hope and liberation,

you reveal your divinity in our humanity.

Help us who have been sealed with your Spirit,

to bear your image in the world,

and bring others to know, the salvation of God.

Amen

The Venerable Matthew Trick, Residentiary Canon