**Hearing a Different Message. January 30 2022 Luke 4:16-30**

Some years ago the ME Bank mounted an advertising campaign. It featured using music like Beethoven’s Fifth symphony and Handel’s Messiah with the repeated lyrics “me, me, me, me”. Their marketing loudly sounded the message This bank is “all about “me”! I recall being shocked by the blatant egocentric emphasis. We have long recognised the inherent ego-centric tendencies of young children, but have also expected that added maturity would lessen this emphasis.

We seem now to have an incredibly strong emphasis on “giving people what they want” and our political organisations put their own spin on making their agendas appear to be “what the people want”.

Yet we all recognise that what we want, often varies starkly from what we need, and from what would be best for our long term growth.

We recognise that very few people courageously speak out against popular opinion. Only occasionally do we encounter someone like Greta Thunberg, Martin Luther King, or William Wilberforce who passionately speak out pursuing causes which change the course of history.

**What did Jesus come to do?**

From the outset of Jesus’ ministry we see a man who is not just going to “give people what they want”. Jesus words in this passage unveil the implications of his identity and mission. He claims the status of One empowered by the Spirit of God and commissioned by God with a prophetic ministry to the whole community. He is not merely “Joseph’s Son” from Nazareth. He claims a God given authority.

He is a regular worshipper and participant in the activities of the Synagogue, familiar with the Scriptures and ready to interpret them. We believe that the Synagogues in Jesus time were led by the laity, often by the Pharisees and operated as “the institutional centre of a religion of the ‘Book’. It remains the dominant form of Judaism” today.

The story comes to a sharp focus when Jesus begins to interpret the Scriptures. At this point he sat down and the people sat with him focused and intent on hearing what he had to say. He aligned himself with the prophecy he had just read. A recognised Messianic prophecy in which the people had long placed their hopes. He announces that there and then, in their presence this has been fulfilled. This produces a warm, positive response from the people. “All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth”.[[1]](#footnote-1)

A the people identify Jesus as “Joseph’s son” he begins to diffuse their praise and challenge their assumptions, particularly their assumptions about the focus of his ministry. It appears that they had assumed that they would have a particularly favoured position as recipients of his ministry. Jesus identifies with their culture using a common idiom “Physician heal yourself” which was used in rhetorical arguments to emphasise one’s obligation towards family not just other people.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Then Jesus emphasises the more expansive scope which would characterise his ministry. He affirms the ministry he had, and would continue to have in Capernaum, a town believed to have had a significantly high non-Jewish population.[[3]](#footnote-3) Jesus built a picture of the scope of his ministry stretching out to all people, Jews and Gentiles. The words of Isaiah’s prophecy emphasise the inclusion of those commonly viewed as “outsiders”, those with physical or other impairments, the prisoners and the poor. Earlier in Luke’s gospel Simeon affirmed during Jesus infancy that Jesus would bring light to the Gentiles[[4]](#footnote-4) and the “falling and rising of many in Israel”[[5]](#footnote-5).

Finally Jesus again uses their own Scriptures to affirm the scope of his ministry. By quoting the selected miracles of Elijah and Elisha Jesus shows that throughout their history God has used God’s prophets to bless the Gentiles. Both Namaan and the widow of Zarephath would be Gentiles of low socio-economic standing. Their situations of suffering from leprosy, and being widowed and poor, would have alienated them from their wider communities. Jesus’ ministry would reach out to everyone and particularly to the marginalised. Jesus’ ministry would cause upheavals in society in vastly different ways to what his audience in the synagogue were expecting of a coming Messiah.

**How did this community respond?**

Jesus’ interpretation of his ministry threatened their acceptance of him. In stark contrast to their earlier mood of affirmation and pride, now the anger of the community had been aroused. “When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

Fred Craddock makes this comment, “[a]nger and violence are the last defence of those who are made to face the truth of their own tradition which they have long defended and embraced. Learning what we already know is often painfully difficult. All of us know what it is to be at war with ourselves, sometimes making casualties of those guilty of nothing but speaking the truth in love.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

Through the ages, Israel had been aware of the limitless reach of the love and grace of God. However, there was always the persistent temptation to focus on their own communities rather than those who were different from them.[[8]](#footnote-8) The tension in this story is between their own Scriptures and how they were living their faith.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Israelites’ emphasis on their own community boundaries hindered the people from appreciating that God had placed a prophet amongst them.[[10]](#footnote-10) The result is that “[t]he prophet who announces a message acceptable to the Lord is not acceptable” to the people. [[11]](#footnote-11) “Jesus does not go elsewhere because he is rejected, he is rejected because he goes elsewhere.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

**How might we respond**

What things or people have we grown accustomed to ignoring?

How do we hear a statement or question that is unpleasant, astonishing, a concept that threatens our expectations? How do we cope with facing the truth about ourselves? How do we cultivate attitudes that encourages others to speak the truth in love?

Maintaining our responsiveness to God can require nurturing an intentional focus on remaining open to God. When Elijah approached the woman of Zarephath he challenged her to act upon his request, despite her justifiable anxieties. Remarkably she was responsive to the instructions God had given through Elijah and she was blessed.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The message of Jesus constantly challenges us, touching us at points, consistent with where we are in our journey. The message of Jesus is not commonly heard in our broader communities. It is of course at the core of who we are as followers of Jesus. Jesus changes lives. Jesus forgives, transforms, releases, heals, and empowers. Responding and continuing to respond to the message of Jesus fuels our understanding of God and gives us practical understandings of Jesus which we can share with others.

At various points in my Christian journey I have found myself needing to examine why I believed what I believed. Sometimes provoked by challenges from others, other times prompted by some new understandings which were in tension with other beliefs.

It will always be important to not allow other things to squeeze out the important issues we must face.

1. Luke 4:22 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997) 216-217 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Fred B. Craddock, *Luke,* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990) 63 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Luke 2:32a NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Luke 2:34b NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Luke 4:28-29 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Craddock, *Luke,* 63 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Jonah 4:1-11 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Craddock, *Luke,* 63 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. R. Alan Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck et al. (Eds) *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,*(Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 108 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Luke Timothy Johnson and *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke,* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2006) 96 accessed as ebook via <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dml/reader.action?docID=5558124> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Craddock, *Luke,* 64 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 1 Kings 17:17-24 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)