

LUKE 4. 14-21

GT MISS. 27.1.13

*LOVING HEAVENLY FATHER, WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR  
WORD AND WE ASK YOU TO MAKE IT COME ALIVE FOR US  
THIS MORNING. IN JESUS NAME. AMEN*

*'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.'*

*AND HE ROLLED UP THE SCROLL, GAVE IT BACK TO THE  
ATTENDANT, AND SAT DOWN. THE EYES OF ALL IN THE  
SYNAGOGUE WERE FIXED ON HIM. THEN HE BEGAN TO  
SAY TO THEM, 'TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE HAS BEEN  
FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING.'*

TODAY IS HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY. I CAN'T THINK  
OF A MORE APPROPRIATE TEXT THAN THE ONE JESUS  
TOOK FROM ISAIAH IN OUR GOSPEL READING THIS  
MORNING. BUT OF COURSE WE HEAR THINGS  
DIFFERENTLY IN DIFFERENT TIMES. IF THE CHRISTIAN  
CHURCH HAD HEARD THOSE WORDS LOUD AND CLEAR  
BACK THEN THING MIGHT HAVE TAKEN A VERY  
DIFFERENT PATH.

FUNNY HOW SELECTIVE WE ARE ABOUT THE WAY WE  
READ THE BIBLE.

JUST LOOK AT US HERE THIS MORNING.

WOMEN: HAVE WE GOT OUR HEADS COVERED?

MEN: WHAT ABOUT ALL THAT SHORT HAIR AND SHAVING?

WHAT DID YOU HAVE FOR LUNCH TODAY -PORK ANYONE?

OF COURSE THINGS CHANGE. OUR SOCIETY ORGANISES ITSELF VERY DIFFERENTLY NOWADAYS -BUT MORE THAN THAT, MOST OF US SEE THE BIBLE AS THE LIVING WORD OF GOD -HIS TRUTH WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT INTERPRETS AFRESH TO EACH GENERATION.

A VERY OBVIOUS EXAMPLE WOULD BE THE ISSUE OF SLAVERY. VERY TOPICAL AGAIN AT THE MOMENT - LINCOLN IS SURELY IN FOR A FEW OSCARS. ALTHOUGH THE BIBLE EXHORTS SLAVE OWNERS TO TREAT THEIR SLAVES WELL -EXPECTS A HIGHER AND MORE HONOURABLE WAY OF BEHAVING, IF YOU READ THE TEXT LITERALLY YOU WOULD NOT CONSIDER IT IMMORAL TO OWN A SLAVE.

QUITE CLEARLY THE HOLY SPIRIT ENABLED WILBERFORCE AND CO. TO SEE THE DEEPER PRINCIPLES AT WORK IN THE BIBLE -PRINCIPLES ABOUT OUR EQUALITY IN THE EYES OF GOD, PRINCIPLES ABOUT TREATING EACH OTHER WITH LOVE AND RESPECT. AND THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S WORD HAD A NEW AND POWERFUL IMPACT WHICH CHANGED SOCIETY FOR THE BETTER.

THE OTHER OBVIOUS CASE STUDY WOULD BE APARTHEID. THERE WERE MEN AND WOMEN OF GENUINE FAITH WHO SAW IN APARTHEID A FULFILMENT OF A NATURAL GOD-ORDAINED ORDER IN WHICH WHITE PEOPLE WERE BOTH SEPARATE AND SUPERIOR TO BLACK. WE NOW UNDERSTAND RACISM AS DISHONOURABLE, NOT JUST IN SOCIETY BUT ALSO BEFORE GOD.

TODAYS' TEXT FROM LUKE IS ONE WHICH SOMEHOW HAD MANAGED TO LAY DORMANT FOR CENTURIES. FOLK HAD SEEN IT AS ALLEGORICAL. SPEAKING ABOUT POVERTY OF SPIRIT, SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS AND THE LIKE.

THEN LAST CENTURY IN SOUTH AMERICA SOME PEOPLE READ IT WITH NEW EYES -THEY READ IT INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT. AND A MOVEMENT BEGAN WHICH BECAME CALLED 'LIBERATION THEOLOGY'

THE BIBLICAL NOTION OF SALVATION IS EQUATED WITH THE PROCESS OF LIBERATION FROM OPPRESSION AND INJUSTICE. SIN IS DEFINED IN TERMS OF MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN. LIBERATION THEOLOGY FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES EQUATES LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOUR WITH LOVING GOD. ISRAEL'S LIBERATION FROM EGYPT IN THE EXODUS AND JESUS' LIFE AND DEATH STAND OUT AS THE PROTOTYPES FOR THE CONTEMPORARY HUMAN STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION. THESE BIBLICAL EVENTS SIGNIFY THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SECULAR STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION.

I GUESS THAT WE ALL TOO EASILY FALL PREY TO THE TEMPTATION TO VIEW SPIRITUALITY AS A SEPARATE AND OPTIONAL PART OF BEING HUMAN, BUT OUR READING THIS EVENING AND THE EXAMPLE OF THE CHRISTIANS IN SOUTHERN AMERICA SHOW US ALL TOO CLEARLY THAT THIS IS NOT GOD'S WAY.

WHAT WE BELIEVE WILL ALWAYS AFFECT HOW WE LIVE - IF WE BELIEVE THAT MONEY IS OF GREATEST VALUE THEN IT WILL SOON BECOME FAIRLY APPARENT THAT THAT IS WHAT DRIVES US. IF WE BELIEVE THAT THIS LIFE IS ALL WE HAVE THEN AGAIN IT WILL SHAPE THE WAY WE LIVE.

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH ASKS US TO BE SHAPED BY WHAT WE BELIEVE ALL RIGHT -JUST LOOK AT WHAT JESUS IS PREACHING ABOUT -STRAIGHT FROM THE HIP:

*TO PREACH GOOD NEWS FOR THE POOR* -THAT'S THE ACTUAL POOR I.E.: NOT ENOUGH MONEY TO LIVE PROPERLY

*TO PROCLAIM FREEDOM FOR THE PRISONERS* -THAT'S ACTUAL PRISONERS -PEOPLE WHOM WE DON'T TRUST OR

CAN'T COPE WITH, MAYBE PEOPLE WHO ARE IN PRISON UNJUSTLY -REAL PRISONERS -IN OUR SOCIETY OR IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

*RECOVERY OF SIGHT FOR THE BLIND* -THAT'S SURGERY, MEDICINE -PRACTICAL HELP SUCH AS THE PROJECT IN GONDAR IN ETHIOPIA

*RELEASE FOR THE OPPRESSED* - THE MINORITY -THE PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT AND NOT ACCEPTED BECAUSE OF IT - PEOPLE WE CAN'T UNDERSTAND MAYBE -REAL PEOPLE GETTING A ROUGH DEAL -PEOPLE IN OUR MIDST -HOW ABOUT THE WAY WE TREAT PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS IN OUR SOCIETY -HOW ABOUT HOW MANY FOLK IN PRISON HAVE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AND CAN'T READ, AND GREW UP IN A CHILDREN'S HOME. JUST YESTERDAY I SAW THAT THERE HAS BEEN A 42% RISE IN PEOPLE SLEEPING ON THE STREETS IN LONDON IN THE PAST YEAR.

*PROCLAIM THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOUR* -I.E.: DON'T GO ON AND ON GETTING EVERY PENNY OUT OF YOUR DEBTORS -LET THEM OFF -REMEMBER YOU HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN.

THIS IS THE ONLY SERMON WE HAVE OF JESUS SPEAKING AS A RABBI IN THE TEMPLE -AND THERE ISN'T A WHOLE TON OF CLEVER THEOLOGY - HE DOESN'T BANG ON ABOUT SOME OBSCURE VERSE IN LEVITICUS TO KEEP PEOPLE OUT OF THE FOLD -IT IS STRAIGHT DOWN THE LINE -YOU CAN'T SEPARATE WHAT YOU BELIEVE FROM HOW YOU ACT.

BUT IT'S NOT THE WHOLE STORY.

BECAUSE HE GOES ON TO EXPLAIN THAT IT'S NOT JUST WHAT YOU BELIEVE THAT SHAPES YOU.

A VALUE SYSTEM -YES - BUT ALSO A RELATIONSHIP.

HE IS SAYING THAT BELIEF IN HIM AS THE MESSIAH IS ULTIMATELY THE WAY TO CHANGE BOTH YOURSELF AND SOCIETY.

AND WE CAN BRING THE TWO TOGETHER. YES. WE NEED GOOD WORKS -WE NEED TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE BECAUSE OF WHAT WE BELIEVE -BUT THE DRIVER BEHIND THIS IS NOT DUTY BUT A LOVING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD -WITH JESUS CHRIST THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT -WHICH IN TURN TRANSLATES TO LOVING RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER.

THUS OUR DOING WHAT WE BELIEVE IS NEVER COLD DUTY, BUT SPRINGS FROM A DEEP HONOURING OF ONE ANOTHER -FUELLED BY THE LOVE WE HAVE RECEIVED AND WILL GO ON RECEIVING FROM GOD.

WHEN YOU SEND SOME MONEY FOR THE DESPERATE FOLK THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD -DO IT IN REAL LOVE - DO IT BECAUSE YOUR LOVE AND YOUR BELIEF ARE ONE.

THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT -THIS UNITY BETWEEN LOVE AND BELIEF, BETWEEN ACTION AND FAITH.

IT IS WHEN THEY BECOME SEPARATED THAT PEOPLE SMELL A RAT -AND ACCUSE CHRISTIANS OF HYPOCRISY.

LOVE AND BELIEF. FAITH AND ACTION. ALL FUELLED BY THE LOVE THAT WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM CHRIST AMEN