



**Rev Susan Adams**

## **The Edge of Today**

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Luke 4:21-30

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Epiphany

30 January 2022

The season of Epiphany is all about 'seeing' who Jesus is and what he is all about - anticipating the 'ah ha' moment of sudden insight. The stories we have been reading from Luke and John over the past few weeks set out for us the ideas, and theology centered on Jesus, that was developing amongst the early Christian community as they discovered who Jesus had become for them - their 'ah ha'.

While we have been considering the insights surrounding Jesus that have been taking shape, emerging from the memory and stories that had been passed on, we have been discovering about ourselves too. We have had the opportunity to notice the suspicion that readily emerges in communities when someone rises up and challenges the status quo; we often want to challenge them, get them to prove themselves, or cut them down to size: to contain their energy and ideas so we can manage them.

The reading from Luke's gospel this morning is at it again! Luke has gathered together stories about Jesus that sets out a chronology of his life and the symbolic nature of his ministry, including events that shaped it and serve to advance Luke's purpose of showing how Jesus, animated by the spirit of God, loved and cared about all sorts of people - not just the worthy and those who were Jews, but the poor and persecuted from Jerusalem to Rome..

To begin at the end of this morning's pericopé, the people who were present in the synagogue with Jesus on this Saturday morning when he reads from the prophet Isaiah and declares "today the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing". They want to rid themselves of him, and his

challenging ideas: they wanted to push him and his fancy ideas off a precipice! Who does he think he is? Isn't he the son of Joseph the carpenter, shouldn't he be upholding family honour and following his father's trade? They have had enough and don't want to face their own shortcomings nor their lack of energy and enthusiasm for change and challenge! so, just get rid of him!

I read this as I began to think about this morning and I immediately identified with the feelings of the crowd. My feelings rose out of my sense of tiredness, despair at what I would have to cope with again in 2022 as we adapted to our COVID ravished world and the climate crisis that can no longer be ignored. Part of me simply wanted to throw up my hands.

I felt I didn't want to face omicron and be reminded all over again to scan, mask, sanitizer, get my booster shot, have my vaccine certificate ready, and to keep my distance .... And all the rest. Nor did I want to wrap my mind around how to manage my life using public transport, and recyclable products, and avoiding plastic. Too hard!

Luke paints a picture for us of an initially friendly hospitable crowd, pleased to see the local boy in Synagogue with them. But the friendliness quickly turns nasty when in Luke's telling, this local boy needles them a bit - speaking out loud their unspoken question as to why, if he was going to fulfill the text from Isaiah, he was not undertaking healing here in his own village! He quotes Jeremiah to them; he points out that even back in the time of the prophet Jeremiah there were stories of God working in unexpected places, amongst the most despised and vulnerable: lepers and widows in Syria not Israel, Capernaum not Nazareth - not in the towns of the prophets themselves but rather in the villages of 'others'- "Truly I tell you,, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town."

*It's not all about them: it's not all about the would be righteous, he seems to be implying.*

Luke's Jesus locates himself in this tradition of prophets naming Elijah and Elisha where the focus is on the vulnerable, the outsider, the despised. The hometown community are enraged!

It would seem Luke wants us to be aware that speaking the stories of faith and tradition is not adequate, reading them week by week is not enough, nor is waiting for God to provide someone to heal our

social ills for us. Rather, it is up to us to get out of our pews and do something ourselves - to be what we pray for..

No wonder the synagogue crowd felt chastised and thought the precipice idea was a good one!

But, Luke tells us, Jesus walked right through their prejudice and indifference, their complacency - he still had work to do, a vision to preach, a movement to build, people to empower.

We are inheritors of this Story and other stories like it.

We are heirs to the movement that did coalesce around Jesus despite the challenge and demand for change. That 'Jesus movement' grew into the Christian church and has continued through more than 2000 years. It has lost its way sometimes, engaging in persecuting those who were different from the norm, the 'others', those who challenged the status quo, but always there has been the vision of a world where the vulnerable are made strong, the marginalised included, the suffering restored: always there have been women and men who held to the gospel of God as Jesus explicated it and were not seduced by personal power and privilege.

We can all fall in with the crowd and want to rid ourselves of the troublesome voices that prod at our conscience: we can all ask first "what is in it for me and my family?" But, we are still here, still coming week by week to this place that is doing its best to tell the Jesus story and to empower us with that vision of a world renewed, a world 'saved' from the ravages our human fear and lack of imagination has wrought..

2022 is a year that brings once more the opportunity to make our voices heard in the local body elections. Our gospel demands we stir ourselves to take note of the policies various mayoral candidates and would be leaders are prioritising, to have a look at the budget for what the proposed expenditure represents. We will need to ask ourselves how best our city can embrace an active vision of hospitality for all people:

- seniors and the young,
- those from the amazing diversity of cultures who make up our city,
- those who are differently-abled from the norm,
- those seeking to be housed.
- those searching for economic security

And **always, always** keeping in mind the climate crisis that is upon us and how we can live in ways that mitigate the rate of change.

This summer as we were released from the latest lockdown, saw most of us trying to find a new normal for our lives. Some things will be very different from our pre-covid days and we are yet to adjust to them, or even recognise them let alone embrace them as the way we live now: I still have to consciously think about masking, and balk at the COVID tests I've been asked to have.

Our 2021 release from lockdown and level 3 has seen us enjoying the summer and the hot days and the warm sea for swimming and holidaying even while we know the serious heat and the dry is a climate change symptom. While in NZ we have just had the second hottest year ever, and in Auckland the second longest drought (since records have been kept) - other parts of the world have suffered extreme cold and floods.

This year is local body election year, and mid-term in the government election cycle. It is a great time to take stock. To look out for those who could offer us a life-giving, earth-respecting way forward that meets the concerns we have.

It is a great year to add strength and power by putting our bodies where it matters alongside those who will not be stopped by the precipice, not halted by difficulties we put in front of them, but will move on through holding the vision of the kin-dom come on earth, and the love of God let loose.