

Bible Sunday

Last Sunday after Trinity • Sunday between 23 and 29 October

Principal Service readings

Isaiah 45.22-25	God's word has gone forth
Psalms 119.129-136	Your word gives light and understanding
Romans 15.1-6	By the encouragement of the scriptures we may have hope
Luke 4.16-24	Jesus declares the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth

¹⁶When Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸'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,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

²⁰And 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. ²¹Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' ²³He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home

town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.”²⁴And he said, ‘Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s home town.’

Luke 4.16-24 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Luke takes a very different approach to Matthew and Mark. Whereas they place this story late in Jesus’ ministry (Mark 6.1-6; Matthew 13.54-58), Luke places it at the beginning. He has already spoken generally about Jesus’ Galilean ministry (4.14-15), but Luke places the Nazareth visit first not chronologically but programmatically.

The synagogue services were quite informal, consisting mostly of prayers, reading of scripture, comments, and giving of alms for the poor. This type of service arose during the exile as a temple surrogate, but without the priest or an altar. Led by the laity, the synagogue became the institutional centre of a religion of the Book, not the Altar. It became, and remains today, the dominant form of Judaism.

Jesus says and does what is at the heart of Judaism, quoting Isaiah 61.1-2. This event announces who Jesus is, of what his ministry consists, what his church will be and do, and what will be the response to both Jesus and the church. Isaiah has prophesied that God’s servant will meet and satisfy the longing of the poor, the oppressed, and the imprisoned. The Christ will also usher in the amnesty, the liberation, and the restoration associated with the year of jubilee (4.19; see Leviticus 25.8-12).

The response to Jesus is mixed: astonishment, wonder, and doubt. Have vv. 23-24 been added from a separate account, as they make a sharp turn to the negative? Perhaps they become resentful that Jesus, a local lad, carries out his work beyond Nazareth, especially in Capernaum, said to have a sizeable non-Jewish population.

Quotations

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The word ‘jubilee’ is derived from the Hebrew word *jobel*, which means ‘ram’s horn’; since it was precisely that horn which was used as a trumpet, whose sound indicated to everybody the beginning of the

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

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jubilee year. The book of Leviticus, in the code of holiness, is the source which tells us of the significance of the jubilee year, a year of liberation ‘par excellence’, which is at the end of seven weeks of years, the fiftieth year.

Luciano Pacomio, 1941–

2

Yet as I read the birth stories about Jesus I cannot help but conclude that though the world may be tilted toward the rich and powerful, God is tilted toward the underdog.

Philip Yancey, 1949–

Related topics

For further study:

Bible; year of jubilee; Jesus’ manifesto

Closing Prayer

O God, whose word goes forth in righteousness,
you desire that all should be saved
and come to know your truth.

Let that word be on the lips
and in the heart of all your people,
so that by the power of your Holy Spirit
the world may hear your gospel of liberation,
and through it come to know you, the One true God,
and Jesus, the Christ whom you have sent,
who is alive, and reigns with you for ever and ever.

Celebrating the Christian Year · Bible Sunday, Year C²

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² *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.*

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