

SERMON – 19/5/24

Pentecost Sunday

'The Anointing Spirit'

Luke 4:14-21

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save His people.” (Luke 4:18-19)

There is plenty of bad news around. We only need to pick up a paper or catch a TV or radio bulletin and we are aware of much over which there is to weep – unspeakable suffering in Gaza and in Ukraine, hunger in Africa (whether because of floods in some parts or drought in others), stabbings in the streets of our cities, and much more. We could become quite despondent at the relentless stream of bad news that comes at us day by day. But it doesn't take much to turn the tide. Every now and then there is something really heart-warming that makes it onto the news bulletins and our spirits are raised as we are reminded of the many good things of which human beings are capable. There is good news out there. Sometimes it just needs to be told.

Good News of course takes us to the very heart of Christianity. And despite what may be going on around us in the world, despite even what we may be going through ourselves as individuals, at the heart of who we are as the people of God is this Gospel. If we have no good news to celebrate and to share as a Church, then what hope is there for the wider world? It's this supreme Good News that I would like to lift up before you this morning as we listen for God's Word to us today.

Something significant has happened. Jesus, who had been brought up in Nazareth; who, we are told, was customarily to be found in the synagogue on the Sabbath; and who doubtless was no stranger as a reader at the services there, had been away for a time. From Luke's account, we know that He had been to the Jordan to be baptised by John and that He had subsequently been led by the Spirit into the wilderness being tempted by the devil for 40 days. On His return to Galilee (Luke tells us that it was in the power of the Spirit), news about Him seems to have spread – presumably at least something of what had happened

to Him while He was away had become known and in any case, to much public acclaim and the delight of all who heard Him, He began to teach God's Word. When He came home to Nazareth and stood to read the Scriptures - whether it was the reading set for that particular day or not we do not know - He turned to what we know as the 61st chapter of Isaiah and read the words that I have taken as my text this Day of Pentecost.

Like Isaiah before Him, Jesus also knew that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him. Jesus also knew that He had been chosen to bring good news to the poor. Jesus also knew that He had been sent with a proclamation of liberty to make. And while none of us would set ourselves on a pedestal with Isaiah, let alone with the Lord Jesus, it is of the essence of our faith as Christians that we too are being filled with the Spirit of God, that each one of us is chosen and called by God for particular tasks, and that we too are being sent to make known good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, what does it mean for us to be filled with the Spirit of God, (or to be 'given the Spirit to drink' as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians) and thereby to be appointed to bring good news to the poor?

For a start, who are the poor in Kinross? I'd like to suggest that they might not be those who come immediately to mind. We may tend to think of poverty immediately in financial terms and in these days there are certainly far too many who are struggling financially, with very few exceptions people in this country have access to food and clothing and shelter and while we as Christians should certainly be working to ensure a just sharing of material goods, I don't believe that when we read here about good news for the poor we should be thinking here primarily of those who are economically poor.

Although Luke doesn't quote it all, the verse that Jesus read in the synagogue counts among the poor those who are broken-hearted, those who are prisoners, the blind, the oppressed and those who mourn. Now, I imagine that all of you can immediately think of someone in your family, someone amongst your circle of friends, one of your neighbours or someone with whom you work or go to school who is 'poor' at the moment in one of those senses. People's hearts are broken when a

marriage falls apart or a friendship is betrayed or an illness is diagnosed; people are held captive by their fears and anxieties; people are imprisoned by their circumstances, by addiction to alcohol or drugs, in abusive relationships; people do not only mourn the loss of loved ones, they can also be sorrowful because a child has flown the nest, grief-stricken because a friend or family member is unwell, sad because the familiar has been taken away from them.

Who are the poor of our community? Any and all of the people who come to mind as we reflect upon these things. Perhaps it is you yourself who are experiencing some poverty of life at the moment, some heart-break or sense of being trapped, some particular grief or sorrow. It was to such as these that Isaiah was sent with good news. It was for such as us that Jesus Himself was sent with the good news in its fulness. And God has the same concern for the poor in our community today, which is why He comes upon such as us by His Spirit and is calling us to share the Good News in our time.

Who has come into your thoughts in the course of the last few moments, I wonder? That thought is between you and God, of course, but if we were able to bring them all into the open and speak about them here this morning, I think we would probably find that a huge number of people in this community and beyond are being held before God right now in our thoughts and prayers. As you hold that person, those people there just now, ask yourself what the Good News of Christ might have to offer them in their situation today or in the coming days or weeks. Is it the promise of comfort in lonely sorrow? Is it the hope of healing in the face of ill health? Is it the joy of salvation and victory over death? Is it the freedom of release from those things that hold them captive?

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is Good News in every possible way, good news that can touch people in every area of their lives. God announces through Isaiah and brings to fulfilment in Christ healing and release, freedom and salvation, the vanquishing of evil, comfort and joy, gladness and singing. Through Christ there can be healing of body, mind and spirit – perfect wholeness that enables people to experience life in all its fulness; through Christ, there can be an escape from those things which threaten to rob us of life and there can be freedom even in the darkest

prison. The Christian can be enabled to sing praise even through days of sorrow, sustained and supported by the promised comfort of a loving, heavenly Father. There is Good News in Christ for all people, however troubled their circumstances may be.

If you are in Christ, then the Spirit of the Lord is upon you. Who is going to bring the Good News of Christ to those who have come to each of our minds here this morning if it is not us? The first Christians, empowered by the Holy Spirit that first Day of Pentecost went to the ends of the earth with the Gospel. And there is the same tremendous potential in this very moment, in that very thought. How will that potential be realised unless we each are prepared to acknowledge that like Isaiah, like Jesus Himself, we have been filled with the Spirit of God for a purpose; we have each been chosen by God to be His ambassadors in this place at this particular time in history; and we (you and I, all of us) are being sent to bring good news to the poor.

In our prayers in a few moments, we will have the opportunity to lift those people we have been thinking about before God, to ask for His particular touch upon them, but as we pray let us also ask God to show us how we may be bearers of Good News to them in the coming week. Not all of us are preachers and we're not all called to share the Gospel by our words. As Paul writes to the Corinthians, each one of us has particular Spirit-given gifts to be used in Christ's service - some of us are called to serve, others to teach, some to encourage, some to use their gifts as stewards of money or of property, others to show generosity or kindness, but all of us are called one way or another to bring good news to the poor.

'Whom shall I send?' asks the Lord. What will be your response this morning, and how will you play your part in turning the tide of doom and gloom that so easily fills our horizons? Isaiah said, 'Here am I. Send me.' Jesus said, 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me.' The Word made flesh said, 'This passage of Scripture has come true today as you heard it being read.'

What about us? What shall we say? Together, let us proclaim that the time has come by bringing good news to the poor, and by proclaiming liberty for the prisoners, recovery of sight to the

blind and freedom for the oppressed, for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is true freedom and life in all its fulness.