

2021-05-16 ... 6.30pm Evensong ... Mrs Jane Rylands

Isaiah 61; Luke 4: 14 - 21

We don't have to work our brains very hard to see the link between the two passages set for us this evening. And my guess is that those hearing Jesus reading that day in Nazareth were very familiar with the text.

I don't know how a modern Jew would hear the Isaiah passage but those original hearers would have claimed it I think as a text of promised victory. They would hear that: **'I, the Lord, love justice'** as justice for the Hebrew people – *they* are the ones who have been captured, who are broken-hearted for what they have lost. The promised justice is that *they* will be able to rebuild what has been destroyed, will have foreigners working in *their* fields instead of being the workers, and be priests of the Lord feeding on the wealth of nations and receiving a double portion. And Jerusalem *was* restored to the Hebrews, the prophecy was at least in part fulfilled.

Jesus seems to have picked only an extract of the text. Does this change its meaning? He is the second to say: **'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me'** and I have been sent (me) to do these things. What does that mean for us who hear them again two thousand years later?

I was reading some art stuff during the week and came across a quote by **Auguste Rodin**, famous amongst other things for his sculpture ***The Thinker*** and he said: **'I invent nothing, I rediscover'**.

In my thinking I immediately made a link to these two passages which were on my mind for this evening. Jesus' message was not new, God had laid it out many times before, but somehow we good folk constantly end up distorting it and corrupting it. It needed rediscovering.

Luke places this story right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry so that it reads like a manifesto. We've seen a bit of that in the last week or so with the local elections. People setting out what they think are the important things to be instigated for the benefit of residents, how our taxes should be spent. Both our town council and county council have seen significant changes of membership, a reaction by voters against perceived errors of judgement by previous councillors ... The newbies are probably going to find it's not so easy to put into practice their declarations of intent because in practice so many things have to be weighed in the balance.

This holy manifesto, like those addressing local politics, appears to be a simple thing and through our Scriptures we can glean much about what Jesus intended it to mean from the way he acted it out. But I'm sure we have all met situations where it doesn't seem so obvious when we try and adopt it for ourselves. For instance, do some of the 'poor' or in other translations 'the destitute', or 'the humble' seem more worthy of our help than others? Should we be pragmatic about our approach or endlessly generous?

I don't suppose Rodin really had this situation in mind when he said he invented nothing but rediscovered, he was speaking about finding shapes in a stone or on a canvas, but I think it is what we as 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians, and as our forebears also in their time, have to do. We have to rediscover what God intended, what Jesus tried to make plain to us.

The starting point for me is always the commandment to **'Love one Another'** and sometimes that makes the way forward plain if not necessarily comfortable. At other times, much reflection, which we might call prayer, is required. And perhaps we will rediscover a meaning of love that we hadn't known or understood before. Perhaps we will rediscover a meaning of love that our predecessors in the faith had forgotten about or suppressed. And because there are many 'perhapses' here, perhaps you and I will come to different conclusions about what Jesus would do ...

But as Christians, this is the one manifesto that we have signed up to, we are tasked with taking this message into the world. We take up the banner not on our own because we too can each say, as Jesus himself did, that: **'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me'**. And once we accepted that God loves us, we accepted that we would go out in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Amen