

Address: Ann

This is a very important reading. The event takes place after the temptation of Jesus in the desert and he is now ready to begin his ministry. He has already made his presence felt in some of the surrounding villages and now returns to that place he would call home. Galilee, which means “a circle” because it was surrounded by non-Jewish nations and therefore was a place with new influences and was quite densely populated. Josephus, the historian, wrote, “ The Galilaeans were ever fond of innovations and by nature disposed to changes and delighted in seditions. They were ever ready to follow a leader who would begin an insurrection.” Christ’s ministry here is often called the Galilaeen Springtime.

I am never sure whether it is a good idea to go home, back to where people have known you from your earliest years. How do we view those who we have watched grow into adulthood? I was reminded of this when a group of friends all of us having taught

together for a very long time met for coffee. We spent quite some time talking about some of the pupils we had taught and found that our thoughts were coloured by how we remembered them. Three of those I had as a form tutor are now in prison for murder but another one is now a GP and others have done really well in their chosen careers. But we remembered them as they were many years ago. And that is how Jesus was remembered, as the carpenter who had helped the family after Joseph died.

Jesus was in an ordinary Sabbath service. The custom was that any adult male could read and preach. We don't know if Jesus chose the passage or whether it was chosen for him. The passage was from Isaiah and this is almost Jesus laying out his manifesto. We are used to manifestos and mission statements which are seen in most large companies. Here Jesus speaks about "release" and the Israelites wanted to be released from the rule of the occupying power. But Jesus was speaking in a much deeper way than just physical release. He was talking about

release, recovery, gospel and today! Four very important words.

What will we do with those words?

There is a story about two sisters, Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Dunlop Gibson. They were born in Scotland in the nineteenth century and travelled to Egypt to St Catherine's monastery, where there were some very ancient manuscripts.

They looked at one which contained writing about the lives of some women saints. They looked at it very closely and realised that the lives of the saints had been over written an early copy of the gospels from the fourth century. It was quite often what happened as papyrus was so expensive. Christ's life shone through the lives of the saints.

Jesus' listeners were somewhat underwhelmed by his words stating that God's grace was for everyone, not just Israel. The Messiah was to be a light to the nations and a servant, bringing God's love and mercy to all. Christ reaches with healing to all and challenges each one of us.

Those four words: release, recovery, gospel and today. What will we do with those words?

There is a story about a Celtic monk who decided to give up study and only to pray. His abness asked how his mind would be fed if he gave up study. The monk persisted and said that he would leave where he was and go and search for God overseas. The abness replied, "If God cannot be found on this side of the sea by all means let us journey overseas. But since God is near all those who call on him, we have no need to cross the sea. The Kingdom of God can be reached from every land." Even in Rutland!

One of the four words is "today" but quite often we substitute that for "someday", not now! We are very good at putting things off; we don't want to make decisions and yet Jesus spoke about today. He offers release, recovery and the good news of freedom from sin with God's love and peace. So what do we do with those four words: release, recovery, gospel and today? The choice is ours. Christ is waiting for us now. Amen.

