

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Today's reading in Luke comes at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. He had been baptised by John and then was led by the spirit into the wilderness for 40 days of struggle with the devil and his temptations. Jesus then returned to Galilee filled with the Holy Spirit's power, teaching regularly in the synagogues, being praised by the people. When he reaches Nazareth, Jesus is developing quite a reputation.

In the synagogues of Jesus' day, it was common for visiting preachers and teachers to be asked to read and teach; so the scene depicted in Luke's Gospel would be a familiar one for the people of the time. In today's Gospel, Jesus chooses to read a passage from Isaiah. This reading is perhaps one of the best descriptions of the Reign of God to be found in the scriptures and here Jesus is using it to set the tone and the agenda for his future ministry. He is taking as his mandate the call to bring God's justice, equality, freedom and grace to everyone from all nations, not just the Jews.

Those listening to Jesus would have been familiar with this scripture reading, but they would not have been expecting to hear Jesus' words as he rolled up the scroll and sat down; "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." When Jesus spoke of God's Reign – and when he used Isaiah's prophecy to describe his ministry – Jesus was referring to something that happens in this life, today, in the here and now; not something that has to wait for eternal life. The emphasis here is on freedom – from poverty, oppression, injustice and physical afflictions. Jesus was speaking about a new way of being in the world – a way of being that brings justice, grace, peace and love to others.

As Jesus fulfilled this ministry, we know that he did not do so alone. He called his disciples to follow him, to work with him and to learn from him. Today, we are Jesus' disciples called to share in this healing work. So, how are we, as individuals and as the body of the Church, going to carry on this work of bringing the good news of the gospel to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight for the blind and to let the oppressed go free? First of all, we need to do what Luke tells us Jesus did, namely, to work in the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to be led by the power of the spirit both as individuals and as the body of the Church; seeking God's guidance, finding out where God is already at work and joining in.

We are all called by God and he has given all of us different gifts to use in building up his Kingdom here and now. It doesn't have to be big over the top gestures; it can simply be: ... being more aware of those around us, noticing when someone is absent and enquiring after them, keeping an eye on our elderly neighbours.

It can also be about how we use our resources, both physical and financial. Do we invest, save, and shop ethically? By taking the time to think about how we buy our weekly groceries we can make an impact on those who work with fair-trade farmers ensuring that they can look after themselves and their families. By thinking about how and where our clothes are made, we can alleviate the horrors of child labour.

Perhaps for some of us, it will be a calling to become involved in civic life, while at the same time using our influence as Christians to ensure justice and fairness in our local communities.

As we look again at the message that Jesus proclaimed in verses 18 and 19 –

“to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captive, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.”

It would be all too easy to think, oh well this isn't really going to be fulfilled until Jesus comes again. But Jesus made it clear that God's Reign began when he had read from the scroll, that it continued with his disciples after his death and resurrection and that it continues with us today and will be **complete** when he returns again.

Father, we pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit you will show us how we can further your Reign of peace, love, justice and grace in our communities and in the wider world. Amen.