Jesus' Manifesto **by Rev John Castle**

A sermon given on Sunday 25th October 2026
at St John the Baptist Church, Aldenham (Evensong)

Reading(s): Isaiah 55:1–11; **Luke 4:14-30**

Introduction

The theme for today is Jesus' Manifesto. We hear the word most commonly at the time of a General Election, when each party sets out its values and what it wants to achieve. It is also in a sense a list of promises by politicians to those whom they will govern if elected.

God, of course, reigns because he is God, not because we elect him. But he has let us know how he would like things to be in his Kingdom, or to put it another way, how people should behave, and how life would be, if we followed his commandments, and he gives us promises about how he will act to help restore things to the state of peace and harmony which has always been his will for the world.

We are living in a world that is in disarray, with much uncertainty hanging over the international scene and our own country. As individuals and as a church we have only limited power to influence what happens on the national or international stage, but we are all called to live out our discipleship where we are, and to do this we need some principles and guidelines. So let me invite you to consider how God's Word could be an inspiration and a guide in our desire to be better disciples of Jesus and more effective as his church here in Aldenham and in our individual lives.

The Spirit of the Lord

In our Gospel reading Jesus, who has been anointed with the Holy Spirit at his baptism, has been teaching in synagogues around Galilee and now arrives back at his home town, Nazareth. Here he is, the man they know well, Joseph and Mary's son. They knew the family; just an ordinary family, running a carpentry and building business. Jesus, they probably thought, was a decent sort. He'd always been well behaved when growing up, never in any trouble, a credit to his parents. In fact, a really good and nice person, quite humble actually. And many of them had been pleased with his work as the village joiner, making tables and other pieces of furniture, doing sbuilding work on their houses and so on.

Then, as we hear in our reading, he's asked to read the scripture reading in the synagogue service.

> [17] And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.
> He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was
> written, [cited from Isaiah 61:1.2]
>
> [18] "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me
> to proclaim good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
> and recovering of sight to the blind,
> to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
> [19] to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."[1]

[1] Luke 4:17-19 (ESV)

Then he says something unexpected: *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

I think it's reasonable to assume that the words Jesus speaks in Luke's account are an abbreviated version of his whole message. And it seems that as he begins to speak, his words are received as marvellous and gracious. Initially, they were possibly intrigued. But Jesus continued, it became obvious that he was claiming that he himself was the fulfilment of this ancient prophecy. As the implications sank in some people got very angry, murderous in fact. They would have known another prophecy in Isaiah chapter 11, which is about the coming Messiah.

> [1-2a] There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
> and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
> [2a] And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him ...[2]

So Jesus was in effect, saying, "I am the Messiah" …. *"Today"*, he says, *"this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" …*

This is not just a local boy who's now got a gift for preaching: this is blasphemy. And I imagine that a few influential and very pious members of the congregation, perhaps the leader himself, start shouting that this must stop, and in a few minutes a crowd of angry people, full of religious zeal, lead a lynch mob that very nearly ends Jesus' life.

The learning for us

What are we supposed to make of this episode in the Gospel of Luke? OK, it teaches us something about how Jesus understood his own identity and how he saw his mission on

[2] Isaiah 11:1-2 (ESV)

earth, as well as giving us a foretaste of the opposition what would one day take him to the Cross.

But this passage is also a challenge to us. As followers of Jesus it is now *our* task to promote the Manifesto of God's Kingdom and to work to make it a reality. Just as Jesus was filled with the Spirit so that he could carry out God's work, so we also must be. The first thing is to *know* what God wants us to do through the *Scriptures*; the second thing is to have the *power* to put God's Manifesto into practice through the *Holy Spirit.*

In Old Testament times the Holy Spirit came upon Prophets and leaders, but not everyone. Since Jesus' death and resurrection, he sends his Holy Spirit to be with all who are willing to follow him.

We, the Church, are Christ's Body. We are to be his hands and feet, arms and legs, ears and mouth, as Paul describes in some of his letters - to be apostles, prophets, teachers, with gifts of miracles and healing, administrators etc.[3] Our gifts differ according to the grace given to us[4]. No one is any more worthy, or less worthy than anyone else. Each of us has our part to play. But we also need to develop the *fruit of the Spirit.* We are told in Paul's letter to the Galatians that *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*[5]

All of this is not just so that we can be nicer people, and enjoy a close relationship with God in our own personal lives. God's agenda is to bring healing and restoration to the world. The

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[3] 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:11-16
[4] Romans 12:6a
[5] Galatians 5:21-22a

verses from Isaiah that Jesus read in the synagogue that day were about setting people free from oppression of all kinds - spiritual, material, social. It is ***good news to the poor***, and we Christians in affluent Hertfordshire cannot sit back enjoying our comfortable lifestyle and paying lip-service to charitable giving while people are living in grinding poverty throughout the world. Do we perhaps need to discover what truly generous giving is, and make sure that as individuals and as a church we are putting into practice the command to *love our neighbour as ourselves*?.

It is about ***liberating captives and those who are oppressed,*** and we are more than ever aware today that there are many people who are held in various forms of slavery almost, as it were, under our noses: women and children trafficked into prostitution in this country, people producing our cheap clothes in unsafe factories in Asia, people recycling our plastic rubbish in polluted villages in China, children held captive in cocoa farms in West Africa so that we can enjoy chocolate that carries no Fairtade or ethical label. How do we shop? What campaigns do we support?

It is about ***opening the eyes of the blind***, and how great a spiritual blindness has descended upon the people of our own country, who have wandered away from the Christian faith and been sold a worldview that says happiness comes through shopping, entertainment and living whatever lifestyle you please! Are our eyes open to the reality of the values that are influencing the people around us?

And if you think tackling these issues is a bit like pushing rocks up a hill, take courage: we are not alone. Together we can

make a difference, as Christians supporting each other here in our local community, and by supporting Christian and other agencies who are working to advocate for the poor, to fight human trafficking, to offer food to the desperate, both locally and globally. *And* by educating ourselves and others about the Bible and sharing the Gospel of Jesus. And above all, by praying about all of these issues. When we pray, we open ourselves to God for him to guide us as to how we should get involved.

God's Manifesto for his world has been set out in the Bible, modelled by Jesus and, by the power of his Spirit, can be put into action by us, his people, TODAY.

Jesus' words in the synagogue in Nazareth didn't get a very sympathetic reception. What about us? Are we willing to listen to what God is asking of us? Will we pray and work so that his Name will be hallowed, his Kingdom will come, and his Will be done on earth as in heaven?

> *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news...*

Prayer

Lord, we come to you overwhelmed by the needs of the world, and feeling inadequate to make a difference. But we wish to be obedient to you, and to play our part as disciples of Jesus in proclaiming good news. Forgive us for our apathy and fear, fill us afresh today with your Spirit and send us out to live and work to make your Kingdom a reality on earth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.