

30th January, 2022 Epiphany 4C The Nazareth Statement from the Heart

Jeremiah 1:4-10 Psalm 71:1-6 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 **Luke 4:21-30**

CALL TO WORSHIP

Sometimes in worship amongst the gladness and warmth of community we are asked to look honestly into our assumptions and mindset through the lens of the loving compassion of God and reevaluate what we see. This can be confronting and create a sense of discomfort. That's okay, we are not left alone in what unsettles us for we belong to a love that sets us free. Today let us see where that freedom might lead us.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Compassionate Spirit, bring the creative power of your love into this space, and into hearts and minds of those of us gathered, that we might become more fully know your way of peace and justice.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (Pat is on reading) (See last page of this document)

Michael with interactive talk 1

Hymn SoF 381 Make me a channel of your peace. Susan Boyle sings *The Prayer of St Francis of Assisi*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUI2EyYIEKs>

PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

(Based on 1 Corinthians 13)

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love,

I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, faith great enough to move mountains, but do not have love,

I am nothing.

If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love,

I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind;

love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful,

it doesn't rejoice in wrong doing, it rejoices in the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends.

Prophecies will come to an end, tongues will cease, knowledge will also come to an end -
but love will remain.

When we speak in childish ways,

love will remain.

When we our vision is dull and we see dimly,

love will remain.

What we know only partially, we will in time fully know,

when we are open to what is to come.

(Hold a time of silence)

God has known and continues to know each one of us fully,
each of us carry God's fingerprints within us.
So, hold on to faith, hope, and love, abide in these three things,
greatest of which is love.

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND THANKSGIVING

Creator and maker of all, We give thanks for your steadfast kindness that stretches from the beginning of time and throughout all of creation.

With your word, you have provided for all living things, there is shelter and nourishment, beauty, and ingenuity.

We have been known by you before we were formed in our mother's womb, you are always by our side, inclining your ear to hear our concerns, standing with us in times of trouble, holding out your hand to us when we are in need.

You are there in our celebrations, cheering us on, delighting in our successes and our joys. We know we are loved.

DISCIPLESHIP THOUGHT

What makes a crowd turn against someone they have previously admired? One contemporary event that might give us insights into today's reading is the way football crowds turned from admiring to booing the AFL player Adam Goodes. There's a lot of commentary about this, some say Goodes became a show-off and dirty player, but another position says that as Goodes became stronger and more secure in celebrating his heritage, it triggered a historical racism entrenched in the Australian psyche, and rather than face the discomfort of their prejudice, the crowds targeted the man who brought it out in the open. Did seeing Jesus so strong and secure in his ministry trigger entrenched thinking and prejudice in the people of his hometown, thinking that led them to consider an act of violence would be the right response? Today we are invited to look at what prejudicial and judgmental thinking we might harbour, and how it could get in the way of being people of compassion and love.

Peter's Talk

I was talking to Kristy McBain's this week about her maiden speech and the support she had from other women in parliament from both sides. A maiden speech sets out the values and agenda for the person's time in parliament.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was prepared over 2 years by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people who, after much discussion over this time and at the Uluru gathering, reiterated the long-standing connection to the land and sought a permanent voice for our indigenous people in national parliament.

Jesus' first sermon - Let's call this The Nazareth Statement from the Heart or Jesus' Maiden Speech

I've included some of last week's reading because we didn't use it and this week's doesn't make much sense without it.

Luke 4:17 to 20 and 21-30 Read by Pat
Talk 2 – Peter (see page 4)

Hymn SoF 205 I cannot tell

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yB68PSLTriE>

for those using the online version you may also like to listen to - **The summons**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-Bq1YtpQL8>

OFFERTORY

There are structures and mechanisms that can entrench people into disadvantage and vulnerability, but there are things we can do to disrupt this. The gifts we give today, contribute to this disruption and create platforms of hope and liberation.

PRAYER

God of freedom, we stand with those who are seeking to right wrongs and upset the pathways of disadvantage. May what we offer today be a sign of this solidarity and our commitment to your good news. Amen

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION (Steve)

(leave a moment between each stanza for quiet contemplation)

We pray for those who enlighten us to our own lack of vision, truth-tellers who tug at our conscience and call us to be more aware, to notice the overlooked and to pay attention to those who are excluded.

We pray for those who step up and call out unjust group thinking, who shine light onto entrenched unjustified prejudices that have long been kept silent, and who do the hard work of breaking them open and dismantling them.

We pray for those who call us to acts of courageous compassion, to not be intimidated into thinking change is not possible, who urge us to hold on to the vision of what the realm of God can look like.

We give thanks for those who use their opportunity and advantage to benefit the whole of creation, who refuse to give up on the earth, who respond to her needs and who generate new ways to care for and live in with harmony with her.

We pray that we might all seek to live faithfully and in peace with one another, overlooking our differences, celebrating our similarities, and nurturing our connections.

SoF 412 O for a thousand tongues to sing Vs 1, 2 and last To 3:45 min for the last verse in this video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFJvBwgmK_c

COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

Go from this place holding onto the knowledge that we are the cherished children of a loving God. Draw strength from this, let it pervade the way you live in world.

The Nazareth Statement from the Heart

I was talking to Kristy McBain's this week about her maiden speech and the support she had from other women in parliament from both sides.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart was prepared over 2 years by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people who, after much discussion over this time and at the Uluru gathering, reiterated the long-standing connection to the land and sought a permanent voice for our indigenous people in national parliament.

Jesus' first sermon - Let's call this The Nazareth Statement from the Heart or Jesus' Maiden Speech

I've included some of last week's reading because we didn't use it and this week's doesn't make much sense without it.

Pat Reads

Luke 4:17-20 then 21-30

17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." ' And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.

There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman

the Syrian.' When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

In our secularised world today experience has shown that it is not things, cash or insurance that make people happy. The things that people long for in the innermost part of their being are liberation, fulfilment, dignity, freedom, peace and catching a spiritual vision of their own true situation and the world around them. Jesus sees his own mission as holistic, and this is the purpose and significance of the Nazareth proclamation.

This narrative demonstrates the vastness of Jesus' incarnational purposes. Individual salvation was tangential to a much larger end—liberation, release, and restoration. Why would a people settle for some being saved when heaven on earth is possible? Is the vision too big to grasp...or does it jeopardize a way of life we don't want to sacrifice? In how many ways do we reject Jesus—and their message of liberation—today? How much of the brokenness in our world persists because we've made the calculated decision to live with it rather than take the personal risk that God's kingdom coming would exact upon our individual situation? How have we snuffed out the light of Christ and traded a world-changing gospel for a feel-good (and diluted) message of comfort?

I've included some of last week's reading because we didn't use it and this week's doesn't make much sense without it.

Last week's reading from the Gospel of Luke left us right in the middle of Jesus' homecoming appearance in the synagogue at Nazareth, when he read an inspiring passage from the prophet Isaiah, and followed it up with a simple yet powerful sermon in verse 21: "Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'"

If this were the movies or television, there would have been a beat of silence, for dramatic effect, while his words sank into the hearts and minds of his audience. This week's reading picks up the story where we left off, and begins on a positive note, repeating verse 21 as a kind of hinge,

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

and then describing the enthusiastic response of the crowd as they marvelled, at least for the moment, at Jesus' "gracious words." Isn't it amazing, they wonder, that one of our very own boys – Joseph's son – could be so impressive? And doesn't he know his Bible!

The warm reception lasts all of two verses, however, because something seems to be bothering Jesus as he listens to the hometown crowd gushing about him. Clearly, he's not basking in the glow of their admiration. Does he know more about their expectations than we can read from the text? Does he feel that they've missed the point? Does he have a sense that they won't like where he's going with this line of

thought, about Jubilee ("the year of the Lord's favour") and the liberation of the oppressed? Or does he suspect that that kind of talk is fine as long as it applies to them, but not to those who somehow stand outside the favour of God? The passage provokes many questions. For me the questions that came instantly on reading the text were

- Why did the crowd become so angry, seemingly so quickly?
- How could Jesus just walk through the angry crowd and then away.

We do not know for sure

We need to remember that when the scene opens this week, and what has happened. Jesus doesn't charge into his hometown, brashly preaching a new message that contradicts the God of his ancestors, the God of his people's holy scriptures. No, in fact, Jesus recites the "old Jewish promises that the Jewish community in Nazareth had nurtured and preserved for long centuries....through all the years of change and loss."

The vision of Isaiah has sustained the people as they have struggled to rebuild their community after exile, as they have suffered under the heel of the Roman Empire, and as they have looked forward in faith to a day when God would make all things right and whole again. And now here's Jesus, beginning his own ministry by announcing that the day they have been waiting for has finally arrived – *in him*. Did you ever hear news so good that you practically hardened your heart against it, in fear of disappointment? The crowd may have been bracing themselves for the letdown, protecting themselves and their ancient hope by rejecting the very one who claimed that those promises were true: You don't get to claim that the 'hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight,' and then go on with business as usual. Is it possible to live for the future so ardently that we do not see the day of the Lord when it arrives, or experience in this moment a time of liberation and healing, when it is right here, right now, right before us?

Were the people around Jesus that day reluctant to get their hopes up, or were they mightily offended by Jesus' call for a jubilee? Our natural feelings of defensiveness' would bring resistance to Jubilee.

Jubilee was the forgiving of debts and the return of land to those who originally owned it. I've heard it said that the Good News isn't going to be "good" for everybody, at least not those who want to hold onto excessive wealth and power and place. The people did not want to hear about the Jubilee that would curb their accumulation. Jubilee, is not just a kind thought or a good intention or a religious idea. It is about money and property being transferred.

I think of the lines in the song ***Inspired by love and anger***

From those forever shackled to what their wealth can buy,
the fear of lost advantage provokes the bitter cry,
'Don't query our position! Don't criticise our wealth!
Don't mention those exploited by politics and stealth!

What discomfort would we feel, steeped as we are in capitalist values and principles, at the thought of restoring property every fifty years to the previous owner. The year of the Lord, the year of Jubilee. (God, of course, was understood to be the *actual* owner). Do we find comfort in scholarship that says that Jubilee was probably rarely, if ever, actually practiced.

In our times and of old it is the most difficult, most demanding, most outrageous requirement of biblical faith. It surely seems so in the modern world with our deep practices of accumulation and our intense yearning to have ours and keep ours and make it grow.

It is the area of economic justice more than anywhere, that the Bible questions our usual assumptions about life in the world. Now I'm beginning to understand why the people were angry.

And it *is* a question of justice, because the practice of Jubilee enacted "what Moses understood" (and surely Jesus did as well): "that you cannot have a viable, peaceable, safe community when deep poverty must live alongside huge wealth, when high privilege is visible alongside endless disadvantage in health and housing and education. You can have some inequities, but the inequities must be curbed by a practice of neighbourliness that knows every day that rich and poor, haves and have-nots, are in it together and must find ways of being together as neighbours in common". We are always talking here how our neighbours are more than those who live physically close to us. We keep hearing this in one realm, about the pandemic, that we are not safe until everyone is safe and that includes all countries, even those who cannot afford to vaccinate their populations by themselves.

The people are waiting, all right, and not necessarily for a Jubilee that means they have to give anything up, but for "the day of vengeance" – the line that Jesus, curiously, leaves out of his reading of Isaiah – when their enemies will finally get what's coming to them. Among these enemies, and outside the circle of God's grace, are, presumably, the Gentiles. But who are the very ones Jesus talks about as the ones who received God's favour and attention, right there in his people's own holy scriptures? The (Gentile) widow Elijah helped, and the (Gentile, enemy) commander, Naaman! What kind of Messiah shows up and announces "the day of the Lord's favour" without also bringing "the day of vengeance" that was promised so long ago?

No wonder the people are so incensed by the stories Jesus recalls: "anger and violence," a commentator called Fred Craddock writes, "are the last defence of those who are made to face the truth embedded in their own tradition".

This passage reminds us of our human nature, our persistence in drawing lines and circles that create a world of insiders and outsiders, and the dismaying way we have, once we're the ones on top, of stepping on those below us. What a revelation for Epiphany season!

A few weeks ago, we began a new year, but we brought many of the old fears right along with us into a "new day." If we just sit quietly with this story for a time, would we be able to feel ourselves in that crowd around Jesus in Nazareth so long ago? Is

Jesus telling us something that we don't want to know about ourselves, that we dread the idea of Jubilee so we find better but incendiary words for it, like "redistribution," so no one will think of even proposing ideas that might make our systems work more compassionately, more justly for all of God's children? Perhaps the story of Jesus being driven to the edge by the crowd that day is a story about us, too, because we don't want to hear the truth about ourselves, and we don't want to think that "those other guys" could ever be like us, with us, one of us. Barb

the Quaker theologian called Barbara Taylor writes "At the heart of any authentic religious experience is recognition that God's nature is too huge, God's movement too deep, ever to be comprehended by a single conception or point of view....God's truth is singular and eternal, but the forms in which we give it expression are as finite and fragile as clay pots, and we must always be ready to break them open on behalf of a larger vision of truth." If that is true, and if this reading of our text is true, then isn't it also true that God calls us, who claim to follow Jesus, on a path that may get us into trouble but impels toward an expansive, generous, justice-seeking vision of the world, a vision that shapes a ministry to and with all of God's beautiful children?

What would it look like for Jesus' first sermon, His Maiden Speech or his Statement from the Heart, and the reading from Isaiah to be fulfilled this day, in your midst? Might it, for example, inspire compassionate, overflowing aid to Tonga or Timor Leste that is accompanied by our own hunger to understand better why countries and people, suffers so much, and a deep commitment toward transforming that suffering into a new and better way of life? Might it call for interfaith respect and dialogue.

Will we run from such a love, and such a call, or will we seek it with all our heart, and let it take us out to the edges of the proverbial cliff, where risk, and hope, and courage all lie?

By the way, you can discuss amongst yourselves how Jesus was able to walk right through the angry crowd because I still don't know the answer to one of my own questions.

Luke 4:17-20 then 21-30

17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." ' And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.

There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.' When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Jeremiah 1:4-10 Jeremiah's Call and Commission

Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,
'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'
Then I said, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak,
for I am only a boy.' But the LORD said to me,
'Do not say, "I am only a boy";
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.
Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
says the LORD.'
Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and
the LORD said to me,
'Now I have put my words in your mouth.
See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant.'

Psalm 71

Prayer for Lifelong Protection and Help

In you, O LORD, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.
Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress,* to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.
Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.
For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O LORD, from my youth.
Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.

Luke 4:17-20 then 21-30

17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." ' And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.

There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.' When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.