

2. Why does Luke include this story? And why at this stage of Jesus' ministry? (compare Mark's account - Mk 6:1-6, and think about differences) How does this passage relate to what has gone before, e.g. Temptations, Baptism, birth narratives, etc? What does it tell you about Jesus' ministry and priorities? Do you think Jesus was being deliberately provocative in v24-27? If so, why? Think of specific examples in Jesus' life which illustrate v18-19. What do they mean for us?

Living it out (Application):

What are some practical implications for you of believing that God's love and grace are for everyone, especially those on the margins?

Coming Up at St Mark's

Trip to the Holy Land. March 2015. There will be an introductory meeting at Guy's at 7.30pm on Tuesday 4th March.

Naked Truth Prayer Event. Saturday 1st March 7.30pm. Led by Ian Henderson. Seeking to pray for our area and to challenge the grip of pornography.



Please pray for...

Look at 1 John 3: 16-20, and pray about your response.

Continue to pray for Jane, Susie Appleby's sister.

Pray that newcomers to St Mark's will quickly find a home here, and for our welcoming team (i.e. everybody ;-!)

Pray for Nick Baines as he prepares to become bishop of the new diocese, and that God would lead us in a strong vision together.

Pray for the people of South Sudan, Syria, and for Christians in North Korea.

Pray for those wrestling with looking for work – that they would have a deep trust in God's love and provision.

Mission Partner Prayer Focus:

Pray for **those affected by flooding and bad weather in the UK, and our Mission Support Group as we seek to make a response.**

Please do take the opportunity for more prayer requests/feedback - it's a wonderful way of sharing.

Thank you for your prayers for this church community!



INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week beginning: 16th February 2014

Worship and reflection: Read Isaiah 42: 1-9. Praise God for the insights into His character and purpose.

Luke 4: 14-30. Good news for the poor.

THE GOSSIP IN NAZARETH

"Well – what did you make of the riot last Sabbath? "

"I was terrified. What got into everyone? They were behaving like animals!"

"Not quite the reception Jesus might have hoped for in his home town.... I thought you said he was a great success in Capernaum."

"Well, apparently he was – he did miracles and all sorts."

"Fat chance of doing a miracle here – he was lucky to get away with his life!"

"I still don't understand – what made people so angry? They all seemed really impressed to begin with – imagine Joseph's son standing up and preaching like that! Mary must have been so proud of him...."

"He was being very provocative, you know..... almost as if he wanted a violent response. And it wasn't exactly an orthodox reading of that Isaiah passage! Did you see the synagogue leader's face?!"

"But he talked about God's love and favour"

"In that case it wasn't exactly tactful to point out two rather doubtful stories about God blessing a foreigner, when there were plenty of God-fearing Israelites in equal need of help."

"Mmm - that certainly doesn't seem fair..... but I'm still sorry we didn't make him feel more welcome in his home town."

"He needs to moderate his language then, or this won't be the only place he finds his life in danger....."

Have you ever felt like pushing Guy or Dan off a cliff?

Have you ever heard a sermon which got under your skin – that you really didn't want to hear?

What was it about Jesus' sermon in Nazareth that so enraged the congregation that they erupted in fury, manhandled him out of the synagogue, and tried to kill him?

It all seemed to start peacefully enough – Jesus is the up and coming preacher around Galilee, and one Sabbath he's at home in Nazareth and goes to the synagogue. He's asked to read, and takes a passage from Isaiah 61: 1-2. Did he choose these verses deliberately or were they the set reading? We don't know – but he treats it as his manifesto: *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.... freedom for the prisoners..... sight for the blind..... release the oppressed....proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.* 'This is what God's love looks like', he told his congregation, 'what his kingdom looks like and you know, it's happening right here – right now – in this town.'

So far so good; everyone is impressed, not to say a bit surprised that the local boy has made good. And preaching about God's love and favour is always popular. But then the atmosphere gets a bit edgy..... 'and God's love is for everyone,' he's saying, 'it's not reserved exclusively for you Jews remember when the whole of Israel was suffering from famine, and Elijah went over the border and miraculously provided food for one Gentile widow? Don't assume you've got a monopoly on God's love....'

What is Jesus doing here? Is he deliberately looking for confrontation? We know that the Jewish scriptures provide a long and complex narrative of God's interaction with his world, and how he revealed himself through his relationship with his chosen people, the Israelites. But there were several strands in this narrative - one was about God rescuing Israel and vindicating them against their enemies; another was about God blessing other nations through Israel; then there was an idea developed in Isaiah about Israel being God's servant, even a suffering servant. ...

Human nature being what it is, you can imagine that the idea of God trampling down our enemies might be more popular than God blessing our enemies through us! So Jesus simply spoke truth about God – it's just that it wasn't popular truth..... God's grace is for everyone, not just the Jews. That wasn't a new truth – it was there embedded in the OT, but for some, it threatened their status and identity as God's chosen people. To have that pointed out by the local carpenter's son was more than they could stomach.

It's always been dangerous to proclaim that God loves everyone - including, and maybe even especially, the marginalized and downtrodden. In this story Jesus was almost killed for it, when he'd hardly started his ministry. Down the centuries, countless Christians have suffered, preaching and living by the same verses - *God's good news for the poor*. From high profile examples like Martin Luther King, or Archbishop Oscar Romero, shot in San Salvador for preaching freedom for political prisoners, to hundreds of other lesser known martyrs.

What is so dangerous about God's love? Why is it a message we find so hard to hear? On a personal level, we like to hear that God loves us.....our family..... nice people..... other Christians maybe. But if I am prepared to accept that God's love is for everyone, I am constantly challenged to change some of my attitudes, my lifestyle, the way I use my money, the way I shop, the way I vote..... and none of that is very comfortable. In general, society is not based on the premise that God loves everyone equally..... if that is the message of the gospel, the good news, then it will be bad news in some quarters, because it challenges injustice, self-interest, the agendas of the powerful. Why is the Bible banned in some countries? Because it is so dangerous.....this book, which looks so innocuous, so ordinary, which we take for granted, is dynamite! In our own country people were burnt at the stake for translating it into language that could be understood... the authorities didn't want ordinary people to know that God loved them and valued them equally..... that the kingdom of God was good news for the poor and oppressed. Why would they jeopardize their own status and power?

Jesus was quite forthright in his message to his fellow citizens. Their identity as God's chosen people was not threatened by God's love for others – on the contrary, they could be channels to extend the reach of that love, just as Elijah and Elisha were. We are so privileged to know God's love, but I wonder if our comparative wealth and status tempt us into subconsciously feeling that somehow it's our right, that we've earned God's favour, and we're scared of letting go of what we've got. It's not that we have to wallow in guilt that we have these things, but what is God's agenda? How can he bless others through us? Can we be like Elijah & Elisha and go outside our own boundaries? Part of our church vision statement is based on this reading: we are '*sent out to bring God's transforming kingdom in every area of life, in the parish, in Harrogate and in the world..... we long for peace, justice and wholeness among the broken and poor...*' It's happening in many practical ways already within the life of the church – what part are you and I playing?

What do we do when we hear God's word and it's a bit near the bone? a bit too challenging for comfort? Do we ignore it, or pretend it means something else? Do we beat up the preacher? Or do we really allow God's word to inform our minds, shape our thinking, affect our lifestyle....? If Jesus came to preach at St Mark's, what would he want to say to us? And how would we react?

Study

Read Luke 4: 14 -30 Choice of approach! 1. Imagine you are someone in the synagogue that day. (who? man/ woman? onlooker/ sceptic?) Look around, listen, observe. Who else is there? What is the atmosphere like – at first – and then later? What is Jesus doing – how does he behave? What do you think of his teaching? How do you react? Imagine the noise as people get angry – what are they saying? Whose fault is it – Jesus? someone stirring up trouble? a religious leader? crowd dynamics? How do you feel when Jesus has left the village? What are people saying about it next day?