

***Manifesto for a Revolution – Luke 4: 14-21 & 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31a***  
**Sermon for Sunday 23 January 2022 by Rev Phil Wootton**

Jesus rolled up the scroll and sat down. The eyes of everyone were fastened on him. He began by saying, 'Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'

The revolution starts today. It begins here. The long-prophesied dreams of liberty are breaking in right now. The Lord has anointed me, says Jesus. Jesus is Messiah. When the Holy Spirit alighted on him immediately after his baptism, this is his anointing. When the water is transformed into wine at the wedding at Cana in Galilee, this is a sign of what the anointed one does. Now, he starts to get real in the world, setting out his manifesto for change. As Messiah he will fulfil the longings and hopes of the poor. He will bring deliverance for the oppressed and imprisoned. He will usher in an age of amnesty, liberation and restoration. How will he do it? That's what we'll learn through the Gospel story. How will it be carried forward after him? That will be the job of the church.

Jesus' revolution began that day. But it wasn't the revolution people expected or wanted. Their eyes were already fastened on him, transfixed by what he did not say. It was where he stopped that surprised them. He was quoting the prophecy of Isaiah 61, and the next line of after, 'proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,' should have been, 'declare the day of vengeance of our God.' Jesus stopped short. He did not say it. Everyone expected judgement on gentile oppressors – the Romans, especially – but it did not come. His revolution was not to turn to violence, as so many later ones did that shared some of the same ideals – the French, for example, which went on to the 'Terror' and 'Madam Guillotine'; the Russian which resulted in the famines and extermination of the *kulaks*; the American, which somehow forgot that 'all men created equal' includes those of African descent. Jesus' revolution involved physical, mental, spiritual, social and economic change. It would arouse huge opposition, not least in his home town of Nazareth, but it did not involve violent overthrow of the current regime, however oppressive its rule. In Nazareth, on that day in the synagogue, he spelled out a manifesto for what his reign would be like – a manifesto for freedom.

St Paul, too laid out a manifesto for revolutionary change. In 1 Corinthians 12 he expresses this big idea: 'In Christ, we are all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free.' It is a radical idea, in our age of identity politics as much as in his. For a Jewish readership of his day, the idea that Jews and non-Jews (so-called 'clean' and 'unclean') could be part of the same 'body' sounds preposterous. For gentile readers, the idea that slaves (who were legally no more than pieces of property) could be part of the same 'body' with free-born citizens sounds absurd. Other thinkers of his day had described a community or city as a body, but the point for most of them was that each person had their set place within it, with their own rights, duties and responsibilities, for most, the places they had been born into. Paul's revolutionary notion is that in the church, with all its inner diversity, no distinctions of rank or privilege can be possible. The church is called to be Christ's body on earth, charged with carrying on the revolution Jesus had initiated. Radical unity was

essential. That was a revolutionary idea to hold in the society of his day, and a revolution that is still not complete in ours.

So, that's a very brief summary of Jesus' manifesto of freedom, and Paul's of unity. What is ours today? How do we fulfil it? I want to share with you a few things – I hesitate to call them manifesto pledges! – but current plans in our parish that relate to the freedom and unity to which we are called.

First, in a few weeks' time we will mark Racial Justice Sunday. The prevalence of exclusion and marginalisation because of ethnicity has been highlighted in the last year. We need to be alert to these issues, and ask where we need to learn, to repent, to do better.

Secondly, one of the ways many people today feel imprisoned is by getting into debt that they can't repay. The 'year of the Lord's favour' that Jesus referred to is the jubilee year in the Old Testament when debts were cancelled. We need to think how we can respond today. On the last Sunday of February, we have a speaker from Christians Against Poverty, one of the organisations we support as a parish, which is deeply involved in helping people to break free of this form of captivity.

Thirdly, we have talked a lot over the last few years about creation care in an age of environmental destruction. We need to renew our own commitments, as individuals as well as church-wide, to fight against climate change and protect the world God has given us to look after. Specifics are on the way.

Fourth, unity: this is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, so please pray for our local churches, with whom we have covenanted, and for the wider church. One issue causing division in the church nationally and internationally is in the area of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. Feelings run very high, so it's really challenging to see how the church can remain in unity across such disagreements. The Church of England has produced a set of materials called *Living in Love and Faith*, aimed to help us to listen to different experiences, feelings and points of view, and to explore them in the light of Scripture, Christian tradition and modern society. *Living in Love and Faith* will be our Lent course this year, and our contribution to the whole church's discernment about how to move forward in this contested area.

Finally, I don't want to imply we are simply an issues-focussed organisation. Jesus brought personal, spiritual transformation to those who encountered him – forgiveness for those locked in guilt, hope for those imprisoned by despair, light to those held captive by darkness. This too belongs to the manifestos of freedom and unity. We, as his church, are called to do the same. We continue to proclaim them week by week in the word that is preached and the sacraments that are celebrated, and to pray for life-giving transformation. It is out of response to word and sacrament, the out-reaching love of God, that we engage with the issues of our society, and seek the kingdom of God in our midst. The revolution begins afresh here today!