

I Believe in the Son, Jesus: God's Love in the World

Luke 4:16-22

Identity is a huge deal in today's society. We need ID to prove our credentials - our age, our right to pass through into other countries, our legitimacy to apply for schools - as we discovered this summer... We have to demonstrate and prove who we are time and again. For access to our phones, our identity can be determined by fingerprint or the metrics of our faces. Even passport control can assess if its us through looking at a picture... but what if we are not recognised as being who we are? How frustrating that can be...

We go back to classical literature and find cases of mistaken identity, or hidden identity in many tales ... When Odysseus returns home to his wife, Penelope - he has to prove that it is really hem, because he is older and looks like a beggar. The tests of true identity comes with things that only he would know - like our 'secret questions' for our bank accounts etc - we don't give away this information lightly - and for Odysseus and Penelope, there was the secret knowledge of their bed being built around an Olive Tree, making it immovable. Shakespearen literature has its own many, many instances of identity being hidden and revealed throughout the plays. Although it makes for good drama as Viola disguises herself as a young man, Cesario in Twelfth Night and who can forget the faery queen falling in love with Nick Bottom the weaver , complete with donkey's head who is putting on a play with his friends... It's like a doubling up of fake identity and confusion...

Do you remember last week, I briefly referred to Abraham and Sarah presenting themselves to Pharaoh as brother and sister, which resulted in all sorts of problems until their true identity and relationship were revealed? Like I said, identity is necessary for safe conduct through the world and in our own everyday - and where a person doesn't truly know themselves or where they are not truly known by those who fashion their destiny - all sorts of problems can occur...

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, Or Lord

This is the next section of our set of credal statements written down by the church over the centuries. We have spent autumn looking together at what it means to believe in God the Father Almighty and the many aspects of that, but now we move to the second person of the Trinity, the Son. Jesus.

Jesus is the fulfilment of all the prophecies and promises of God's saving love for all people which we find in the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Scriptures as we may want to term them. In Luke's gospel we see a pattern on Jesus almost receiving his 'coming of age' paperwork... In Luke 2: 49, he declares; "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

In Luke 3, which you heard me read so well a couple of weeks ago, the genealogy of Jesus takes us from Joseph being Jesus' Father back to God being his Father as the line traces back to Adam, the Son of God. So there is a double legitimacy in Jesus being the Son of God - but, as we see at Jesus' baptism in Luke 3:22, God is himself making the declaration of Fatherhood over Jesus. Jesus is God's only Son. The shaping of Jesus' identity is being rolled out

for all to see. After the tempting of Jesus in the wilderness, we are reminded that Jesus' identity is not shaped by what he feels is owed to him in terms of glory, honour and power - but by the incarnate nature of his being. He is born of Mary and his parents on earth are Mary & Joseph... so, as Jesus begins his ministry, 'returning to Galilee in the power of the Spirit' in Luke 4:14, we see him making his journey 'home' to his father and mother's village. There he will begin with the people who have known him longest and by reputation and reveal his true self...

In turning up at the Nazareth Synagogue, Jesus will lay down markers for the rest of his ministry. He takes up the scroll of Isaiah's prophecy and reads it out. Jesus belongs to Nazareth and he also belongs to the Word. He identifies himself as the subject of the scripture he was reading and identifies also the nature of the ministry that he is exercising.

Looking in there at Luke 4:18 - this is an anointed ministry. Jesus hasn't flicked through a catalogue and picked it out, nor has he picked up the card at the job centre. It is intrinsic to him and is God-Given: By the Father at the Baptism and also by the Spirit's anointing - which we also saw at the baptism. The consequences of the acceptance of these plus the resisting of the temptation to wander off course in the wilderness has meant that Jesus is now claiming his identity as The bearer of the Spirit: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon ME because he has anointed ME"

Our belief in Jesus as God's Son, our Lord takes this moment seriously. Who is Jesus? How does he describe himself and his gifts? Isaiah 61... These very words that he speaks would be up there at the top of his CV. Describe yourself and your ministry Jesus?

"Well", he might say, "you see;

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Under the anointing of the Holy Spirit is a ministry of being sent. It is dynamic and life-changing. It is a message of transformation for the poor. A message of release for captives - reminding us of the exiled days which Isaiah would know well. And we know that we will LITERALLY see Jesus restore sight to some blind people, but there is another message here of a parable's nature - where, to those who have not seen the truth of God's promise for ages for various reasons, Jesus will restore the sight of God's kingdom and promises to them too. Jesus is declaring himself a proclaimer of the kingdom of God. A preacher of Good News and with it come signs of the kingdom - as God's priorities form the scriptures that the hearers have long known - these will be visible in Jesus' ministry.

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son, Our Lord. He reveals his identity to the most sceptical of people - his childhood friends and their families... and he offers us a part in that family, that mission as co-heirs of the kingdom with him.

This year, we have known first-world oppression and first-world level captivity. Many people are experiencing personal, financial and spiritual poverty in very real and present ways. For many, the lock down has locked up outlets for expression, earning and escape from hard and complex

lives. Preaching and proclamation has found Digital outlets for expression and churches are fitting facilities for live-streaming their services for those who are unable to face coming to Church and to meet the needs of a dispersed church family...

Last week, we talked about following Jesus in resisting Temptation and following the calling of Father God. This week, as the celebration of Jesus' incarnation is another week closer, we are maybe measuring our loss. Financial loss, physical limitations, deaths of loved ones whom who were unable to properly celebrate... Loss of purpose, debilitation of mental resilience, the loss of Friday nights out and cosy nights in with friends, stop overs at families' homes and the refreshing break of a holiday in the sun... Loss looms large this year.

What difference will it mean to you to take hold of the line; "I believe in God's Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord?" Will it be one whereby you look at the promises and ways he would do this in Isaiah 61? Where he would remove bonds from your heart and deliver the presence of God right into your life - stripping away the counterfeit identities that you have been given by the world and replacing them with identities of "healed" "restored" "redeemed" "Blessed" "Forgiven" "included" "Family" and so on...

The Son brings the love of God near to each of us. Right now. Right in this very moment - whenever you get to watch this. The Son will bear all your loss, your guilt, your fear - right through the cross so that, on resurrection day - this day in Resurrection Time he can meet you, transformed in the garden and call you to him again, by name. And you will know that you are fully known - that your identity is good and you are accepted through the love of the Son who reveals his Father's heart to you.

Amen