



ANOINTED TO ACT JUSTLY

Luke 4:14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. **15** He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. **16** When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, **17** and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

18 “The Spirit of God is upon me,
because God has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

Has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

19 to proclaim the year of God’s favour.”

20 And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. **21** Then he began to say to them: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

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Elaine Wainwright reads Luke 4:14-20 ecologically, pointing to our invitation to respond to the Spirit poured on us to do justice in our world.

The text from the Gospel of Luke is the Gospel we will hear and read during the 2019 liturgical year. It is a familiar text reflecting what would have been a regular event in Jesus’s life: his going to the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth on the Sabbath and his being called to read from the Torah from time to time. The text from the prophet Isaiah that Jesus selects to read on this occasion as narrated by Luke is often called *programmatic* because it sums up the mission and ministry of Jesus – good news to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind and freedom to the downtrodden.

Reading with All Earth Community in Mind

Traditionally we have read/heard this text against the backdrop of suffering and injustice of the human community. We need to continue to do so as suffering abounds across planet Earth despite our work for justice. For instance, we know that 20 per cent of Earth’s human population consumes 80 per cent of the planet’s resources – which causes extreme poverty and degradation far beyond our imagining for many of the other 80 per cent. But the Spirit of God is given to us in these days as it was given to Jesus, inviting us to expand our discernment of justice. One of the voices that can guide us in this regard,

as the prophet Isaiah guided Jesus, is that of theologian Elizabeth Johnson who envisages: “a flourishing humanity on a thriving planet rich in species in an evolving universe, all together filled with the glory of God: such is the vision that must guide us at this critical time of Earth’s distress to practical and critical effect” (*Ask the Beasts*, p 286).

If this becomes our vision, the lens through which we read our sacred texts, then the planet and indeed the entire universe and all its constituents becomes the context both in which and through which we seek to read the Gospel. Attentiveness to the other-than-human as well as to the human elements and characters in a text is another way of describing the new, expansive way of reading which we now call “reading ecologically”.

Spirit Gives Understanding of New Relationships

The opening verse of the scriptural selection (Luke 4:14) places us in a rich interactive environment. The human Jesus is said to be moved by the power of the Spirit, by a force that is more-than-human but interactive with the human. This Spirit seems to impel Jesus into a material context: the geographical region of Galilee and the village of Nazareth in particular; and the synagogue as the explicit location. Habitat, human and holy in spirit-infused interrelationships opens this section with the natural environment (Galilee and Nazareth in particular) in creative interaction with the built environment of village and synagogue.

It is in this rich, interactive context that Jesus stands up to read. He is handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, a papyrus scroll made from the papyrus plant, the medium for bringing the Jewish scriptures to the community. Creative interrelationships between the human and the material continue to be made explicit in this text (Luke 4:16-17) with the entire interactive context being spirit-filled. It is evident in the opening words of the text of Isaiah 61:1-3 (and Is 58: 6) from which Jesus reads. The Spirit of God has been given to the prophet in a material human body over which oil has been poured out. The oil evokes Earth’s materials: ancient olive trees with their fruit processed into olive oil which is used to anoint – the human and the divine intertwine. The Lucan text specifies Jesus as the prophet to whom this text is addressed. He claims: “Today this text is being fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:21).

Anointed to Do Justice

There is now another “today” – our day – when this text is being fulfilled yet again. We can hear it speaking in an ecological key. The Spirit of God has been given to us, to the entire Earth community, anointing us to bring about now the vision of justice and restoration appropriate to our day.

“Good news to the poor” extends beyond the human community to include all Earth’s species. That good news is of right and just relationships that support the flourishing of all on land, in the oceans and in the air.

“Liberty to captives” includes species which are caught in the web of human power so that they are dying a

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thousand times faster than through the natural process.

“Sight to the blind” evokes the urgent need that the human community sees beyond its own narrow wants and desires and opens its eyes to the plight of the planet itself and all its diverse species.

“To set the downtrodden free” envisages an Earth community in which all its constituents live fully.

This vision enables us to proclaim with the prophet Jesus, in the words of Isaiah, a year of God’s favour. At the time of Isaiah and at the time of Jesus, the words of each prophet rang out for justice. They resound anew in our time and in our circumstances – a time of profound ecological crisis.

As we enter this new year, with the crisis even more acute, may we be attentive to habitat, the human and the holy as we are anointed prophets of a new justice. This new justice extends beyond Earth to include the cosmos. 🐾



Residential Retreats 2019

**Mary McKillop Centre, 56 Selwyn Ave,
Mission Bay, Auckland**

‘Deep calls to Deep’ May 24(10am) — 26(3pm)

3-day silent retreat. If your heart is calling you to put down your technology, come aside, and take this opportunity to be silent, still and notice the deeper desires of your heart; then this retreat could be for you. *Application open to all. Cost to be advised*

‘A New Heart’ July 21 (7pm) — 30 (9am)

An 8-day silent individually guided retreat in the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola. *Application open to all. Cost to be advised*

‘Attending to Holy Mystery’ September 20 (7pm)

— 27 (9am) A 6-day silent individually guided retreat in the dynamic of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola. *Open to all. Cost to be advised*

Further information and registration visit:

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