

“The Beginning of Jesus’ Ministry:

**February 2, 2025
Nelson Cathedral.**

Isaiah 42:5-9
Acts 13:44-49
Luke 4:14-30

Introduction.

You might have seen on the news that the world’s largest iceberg is now on a collision course with the small island of South Georgia in the southern Atlantic ocean.

We are all familiar with the illusion of an iceberg, that we only see 10% of its mass, the remaining 90% is underwater.

An iceberg is also a good metaphor for when someone steps onto a stage to perform – whether it be in the arts like we will have at Opera in the Park in a few weeks

time, or in sport. That moment of performance represents the tip of the iceberg, behind which exists hours and hours of practice to hone knowledge, technique and skill.

We can apply this same image to Jesus as we continue looking Jesus at through the eyes of Luke’s Gospel. The first 30 or so years of Jesus’ life, now lead to this moment, where following his baptism and temptation, Jesus led by the Holy Spirit and begins his public ministry.

Person of Jesus.

In verses 14 and 15 we get a snap-shot of what Jesus did as his ministry began – he travelled through the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues.

And Jesus must have been good at what he did because his fame spread, and people praised him for

his understanding, authority and power, something missing from the religious teachers of the day. A stronger translation of praise is that Jesus was “glorified by all”, which uses a word normally associated with the praise of God and indicates the Jesus was more than your everyday teacher or prophet.

Jesus then arrives in his hometown, and we see more detail about his usual pattern of activity.

Jesus goes to the synagogue where he followed the normal pattern of the service in which the speaker would first read from the Scriptures and was then given the opportunity to tie the readings from the torah (law) and the prophets together through teaching.

Remember Jesus was in our words now “quite famous”; he had a reputation and you can also most hear the tension in Luke’s words as Jesus reads from

the prophet Isaiah, and the people on the edge of their seats in anticipation.

Jesus, begins with, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me”....and concludes with, “today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”. And as Luke writes, “The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him” - what would Jesus, this now famous prophetic teacher say.

We might expect the people to be angry...who does Jesus think he is – surely applying these words to himself was arrogance. This is just Joseph’s son.

But no, they applaud his words. These were encouraging words. The long period of waiting for God to act has ended. And what’s more, isn’t this Joseph’s son?” - this great teacher, this superstar is one of ours.

To understand what happened next we have to remember the popular view of Nazareth, a small rural backwater in the northern Israel, where in the eye of many, nothing good can come from (John 1:46).

The people of Nazareth had a serious inferiority complex. But what if someone great did come out of Nazareth, their reputation would be saved, and now we have Joseph's son – this great prophet.

After training for ordination, my first appointment was as the Vicar in Picton. It does not take long to realise that Picton was seen as third rate by big brother Blenheim. But if someone from such a place excels on a national stage, the whole town can bathe in their glory.

This happened when Joseph Sullivan won double scull world titles in 2010 and 2011, then Olympic Gold in London

2012. He later joined Emirates Team New Zealand, helping them win the 2017 America's Cup. One person excelling can lift a whole town out of despair and installs pride.

Jesus is now seen as someone great, someone empowered by the spirit of God, a great prophet in word and deed...**and he was from Nazareth.** No longer could people look down on Nazareth.

But Jesus knew that even though they recognised him as God's anointed – a great prophet, even though these people were impressed by his teaching, they were not interested in his message, only their reputation.

And so there was the expectation that Jesus would prove himself, which is precisely what the Devil had tried to do in the desert.

Jesus then says, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s home-town”. Harsh words, but it gets worse. Jesus backs this up with a story from the very worse time in Israel’s history when they were furthest from God.

The King and the people worshipped the idol Baal, there was a drought for 3 1/2 years, and God’s blessing was given a foreign widow and a foreign soldier.

Now the crowd was mad, even murderous – they had been compared to Israel at its worst. Jesus the prophet was amongst them, but they had misunderstood who Jesus was and what that meant.

And just as the devil asked Jesus to test God by jumping off the temple, now the people threatened to throw Jesus off a cliff. But miraculously Jesus passed through them and went on his way.

Message of Jesus.

As we look at what Jesus did, it is more important to understand the message that Jesus proclaimed for us to hear. That the people of Nazareth were impressed by his teaching and spoke well of him, that they were not interested in his message which sounds very much like our world.

- Both Islam and Judaism today believe that Jesus is a great prophet;
- even Buddhism and Hinduism see Jesus as a great moral teacher.
- But as Darrell Bock in his commentary writes, “The exclusive claim of Jesus as the unique Son of God and Saviour, and of God’s revelation as located in Christ alone, flies in the face of a worldview that sees all attempts to reach God as legitimate”.

In choosing to read from the Prophet Isaiah, Jesus referred to when God's end-time promise will be fulfilled and God would bring about a new start for Israel. In Jesus, the Kingdom of God had finally come, but not in the way people expected.

- The message of Jesus was good news to the poor, which included the social and economic poor, but also include the "pious poor", all those who recognised their need for God.
- The message of Jesus proclaimed release, a word linked to the year of Jubilee, when all debts were wiped and all slaves were freed. This was the year of new beginnings and a clean slate, the year of the Lord's favour.
- The message of Jesus was not to inflict punishment, but to bring about God's love and mercy.

- The message of Jesus announced God's grace, God's salvation had arrived – not just for some - but for all.
- And most importantly, what Jesus proclaimed, he also accomplished

The teaching that Jesus delivered with authority was the radical message of God's love, which in the coming verses is supported by his ministry of compassion:

- Through the casting out evil spirits (4:31-37),
- healing (4:38-41),
- and later in Chapter 5 (vs 17-26) forgiving sin, something that only God can do.

The goodnews that Jesus proclaimed was truly astonishing to those who first experienced it, but a message that for us hearing some 2000 years on, that can easily loose its cutting edge if we are not careful.

Following Jesus

The words and deeds of Jesus, lead us then to the one central question that Luke emphasises, a question that demands a response, “who do you say Jesus is” (Lk 9:20).

In Jesus, God was once again gathering his people back to himself, but this time not through the Prophets, but now through His Son. And as we read Luke’s account of the acts of the Apostles, we hear Paul bring the message of Jesus to all peoples, not just some.

The response we are called to take, is the same response of the early disciples - to follow and imitate our servant King. A theme we will develop further next week.

Finally, for us as disciples of Jesus and collectively as the people of God -the Church - there is a reminder

that our call both individually and collectively is an extension of Jesus’ mission. In our hearts and in our lives together, there is the call to be both people and places of grace who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to reach our world.

Conclusion.

Our challenge in looking at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry is not just to know about him - **but** to respond to him. There is a **choice** to be made, just like there was in Nazareth and later in Antioch when Paul spoke. A choice to respond to Jesus with our minds, our hearts, and our lives.

As we respond to the question, “who do you say Jesus is”, may we do so in our words and actions, so that empowered by the Holy Spirit we can be all that God has called us to be.

Amen.