



BENEDICTUS
contemplative church

25 January 2024

Epiphany 3 (Luke 4.14-21)

Living the Story

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I was born on Wiradjuri country beside the Kalara or Lachlan River in Central Western NSW, in the town of Cowra, named from a Wiradjuri word meaning "rocks", born in this land of Australia, The Great South Land of the Holy Spirit. I am shaped by the land where I was born, and the places where I have lived since then, by the culture of my family, and the societies I've lived in, and by the biblical stories of my faith tradition.

Gudanji woman Debra Dank, in her book, *We Come With this Place* refers to stories that shape us, like the one we heard today. She says:

The stories, like us, grow from the soil and the fine dirt that plays around your feet and makes the dust that rolls over the vast Gudanji and Wakaja Country. The same dust that throws itself as grit into your eyes when you don't watch it, dancing with the wind across those dry places. And when we eat the food given us by our country, through the kinship we live, we eat those stories into us too.

Stories sit in many places and they talk us into our place.

...

Listen and think and feel and see and believe carefully, all together, at the same time, and let that feeling soak into your bones. Leave it there until that story is the place that grows you - from the inside out - making your bones and body strong until it is time to return that strength to our earth.

Know this story and keep it in your body, swallow each sip of it deeply just as this country drinks in the first rains.

Keep it sitting inside and hold it there because awful things are being done to our country and one day it may not be able to tell us anymore. And then, what will happen to our Country, our body?

Life is Body, Country, Story.

Jesus, in his reading from Isaiah invites us to care for this land and her peoples. Today we hear a foundation story from Luke's gospel, setting the scene for the kind of ministry Luke sees Jesus as stepping into. Jesus, in Luke's gospel begins his public ministry where he grew up.

Last week we heard the beginning of Jesus' ministry according to John's gospel, where he turned water into the best wine, and loads of it, at a wedding, after his mother prompts him. This week we hear the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Luke's gospel. He has returned from the wilderness

where he went after his baptism and where he had overcome temptation. He has returned to his home town and visits the synagogue where he's invited to read from the scroll of the book of Isaiah (a local lad, obviously well known, and trusted). He stands to read then sits down to teach, as was the custom.

He returns home, we read, 'in the power of the Spirit'. This is the same Spirit who was there at his baptism, and which led him into the wilderness in the first place. The Spirit in Luke leads, fills, and empowers for prophetic work. Such characters as Zechariah, John's dad (Luke 1:15, 67-79), his wife, Elizabeth (1:41), Simeon who met Jesus in the temple early on (2:25-32), and John the Baptist (3:16) experience Spirit and proclaim truth through the filling of Holy Spirit, says Ruth Anne Reese.¹

This is the first glimpse of Jesus' public ministry in Luke's gospel, and, first things matter in the Gospels as they set the tone and name the priorities for the narrative to come. So clearly it's important to Luke for us to know that Jesus comes filled with Holy Spirit's power and, perhaps even more, it's important to Luke for us to know just what this kind of power looks like.² This power is demonstrated not by any accomplishments or attributes we claim for ourselves but only through what it accomplishes for others. This power is power only when it sets others free, only when it builds up others, only when used for the betterment of those around us... very pertinent this week. We need to look beyond ourselves. God gives special attention to those whom the world doesn't want to see.

Jesus chooses to read from Isaiah 61:1-2. He takes on the story as his own, proclaiming good news to the poor — to those who are economically disadvantaged and marginalised, especially prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed. What is this good news? It is news that this is the "year of God's favour." The year of God's favour describes the Jubilee year when God will restore Israel.³ Every 50th year was to be set aside as a time for liberation and restoration when all Israelites would return to their ancestral land (Leviticus 25:10). Those who became poor were not to be taken advantage of nor taken as slaves but rather treated as hired hands and released at the year of Jubilee. Isaiah 61 was interpreted in first century Judaism as a reference to the Jubilee and the restoration it envisioned.

This is the first mention of the poor in Luke, but already we have seen that, according to Mary, the powerful and rich are sent away empty, while the hungry are filled with good things (Luke 1:52-53). Those who are at the bottom of society are the Spirit's chosen recipients of the good news. Jesus brings good news not to the powerful, the gatekeepers, but to the poor, captive, blind, and oppressed.⁴ Jesus shows God's power as uncomfortable and challenging, because its focus is on the forgotten, overlooked, discarded.

Jesus says he comes for them, so his message can be challenging to some of us who are part of the dominant culture. On this Eve of Australia Day, also named as Invasion Day or Survival Day, the invitation is to focus on those who may seem marginal to our lives, including those who are the traditional custodians of these lands, the First Nations, or Aboriginal Peoples of Australia.

¹ [Ruth Anne Reese](https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/third-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-414-21-3)
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/third-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-414-21-3>

² <https://www.davidlose.net/2016/01/epiphany-3-c-a-peculiar-power/>

³ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/third-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-414-21-3>

⁴ <https://www.davidlose.net/2016/01/epiphany-3-c-a-peculiar-power/>

David Lose reflects that God seems to see the parts of us that we don't want seen. God loves us enough to see us and to forgive us, God loves us enough to challenge us, and God loves us enough to send us out to see and love and forgive others – especially those the world does not see. To do that is to share in the peculiar power that drives Jesus to preach such an odd and inclusive sermon. This is Good news for those who heard it then and for those who hear it today. But it is also challenging, as it makes it difficult to exclude anyone. This is a powerful, and challenging word of love, acceptance, and grace.⁵ How do we live it?

Most of us, the later comers have done well here in this land. Perhaps not so well, the dispossessed first nations peoples, though they too are taking back control of their lives, and some of you may be here today. You are an inspiration to me. I think of First Nations People - Writer, speaker and journalist, Stan Grant, Indigenous politicians, and leaders in the Public Service including Linda Burney. I think of Brooke Prentis, Aunty Kath, Auntie Miriam Rose Ungumarr Baumann, Auntie Kathleen, Shane Mortimer, Professor Uncle Tom Calma, and Priests and ministers, Auntie Lenore Parker, Uncle Ray Minnicon, Kathy Dalton and Aunty Phyllis, Uncle Tom Slockee and many many others.

We who are here today, have our belonging deeper than race or nation, we belong to this strange inclusive loving God, and we need to listen to our elders and wisdom keepers. Many of us follow Jesus, his way, his teaching, his stories, and it is from that standpoint that we contribute to our society.

'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,' Jesus says, naming himself the place for the fulfilment of the story he quotes. He will live and proclaim this message of healing and freedom. Jesus' hearers are rich and poor; seeing and blind; oppressed and oppressor — I wonder what liberation looked like for them, I wonder what it looks like for us today?

Life is Body, Country, Story.

In London during Black Lives Matter Riots, Black Englishman Patrick Hutchison, rescued an injured far-right counter protester, and the image went viral. He said that for him and his friends, it was all about doing the right thing in a tense situation.

Here in Australia with racist messages and arson attacks, we need to act and speak up for those who are on the receiving end.

Jesus words live in us, are embodied in us, here today in Australia, the UK, South Africa. They inform who we are, they teach us.

Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

⁵ ibid.,

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. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' (Isaiah 61:1-2)

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