

- Should those who are infected with Aids be disdained as self-destructive fools who are earning the wages of their own sins?
- Are nice, well educated, middle class people more acceptable and welcomed in our church than would be the rough-edged riff raff?
- In summary: are we, in our attitudes, values, and activities, being ruled by pride, fear and selfishness rather than the love of Jesus? Or are we genuine practitioners of the Jesus thing?

The only time in which we can live is now. **Today!** Yesterday is history and cannot be regained. Tomorrow is mystery and cannot yet be visited. This day is what matters to Christ Jesus. Now is the hour when the “**Jesus thing**” stands before us as unlimited opportunity.

Luke 4:18 from ‘The Message’ *He was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written, God's Spirit is on me; he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor, Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, To set the burdened and battered free, to announce, "This is God's year to act!"*

Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”

Either you are with him today or against him! Today!

Amen!! Thanks be to God!!

*This sermon was preached by Rev Mark J Dunn at
St John's Uniting Church
Cnr Mt Alexander Road and Buckley Street Essendon Victoria 3040
Home/Work Ph: 9375 1065
Mob: 0409 009 443 Email: mark@dunn.id.au*

*www.stjohnsessenon.org.au
Enquiries about the Christian faith are always welcome.*



A Message from Mark! **Doing the Jesus Thing Today!**

24 January 2010 - Epiphany 3
Scripture: Luke 4:16-21

The first recorded word from a sermon by Jesus is “Today.” It was in his home synagogue at Nazareth that he gave his message for the first time.

Jesus closed the sacred Scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down, and all the eyes in the synagogue were fixed upon him. He began to speak to them: “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

There would be many more words to follow in the months ahead that would both unsettle and enthrall people for two millennia. But Jesus’ first word was simply “Today”.

Luke presents these words as Christ’s manifesto and he believed passionately that they were being fulfilled in his lifetime. These words define what Jesus was on about. This was “his thing” because it was “God’s thing.”

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Never confuse Jesus with those over zealous iconoclasts who are so filled with their own self importance that they scorn the past. Jesus was not an angry young man on an ego trip. That was not his thing.

Jesus treasured the past and honoured the teaching that has been passed down by Jews through many generations. He fed his soul from the sacred scrolls of Scripture. During his temptations in the harsh Judean wilderness, he rebutted Satan with quotations from the Scriptures. On his return from the desert to Nazareth, he quotes from the prophet Isaiah in his first sermon. It forms his mission statement. He cherished his Biblical heritage and so should we.

But he was called to be neither an historian nor a museum curator. He looked to the present and the future. What the prophets had hoped for, Jesus believed was available today. The new age of the Kingdom of God was already breaking in upon them. The opportunity was now.

The challenge of Jesus was (and is) for **today**. ‘Now is the Time!’ was a recent NCYC theme which fired up many passionate young Christians with a missional urgency! **Now** is the hour of grace. **Now** is the moment of opportunity. **Now** we chose between darkness and light.

And that moment of opportunity is inextricably tied to how we treat one another. Our attitudes, relationships, deeds. Especially how we treat the poor, the captive, the blind, the oppressed; those whom this proud world regards as unimportant or even disposable. Caring for people today is “his thing.”

In his “**Today**” sermon he rams home his intent by insisting that God’s mission included despised foreigners. He reminds them that when Elijah was in need, God met that need through the hands of a Phoenician widow of Sidon. And the Syrian soldier, General Naaman, found healing from Elisha ahead of many Jewish lepers.

“**Today**” includes those who are either ignored, despised, abused or hated. God’s grace recognised no barrier of race or social class or religion. Inclusive love is his thing.

And it is this comment that appears to have changed the mood of the congregation from admiration for the gracious words that Jesus spoke, to one of open hostility and violence. He went too far - he challenged too much!

What about us today? Are with Jesus or against him? Are we for his manifesto or against it? Do we live as if all lives are equally important to God, or as if some - perhaps those in distant Haiti; are of lesser value? Do we carry on this “**Jesus thing**” which is “**God’s thing**”?

Don’t wait for the kingdom of God to come in the future. With Jesus it’s here today. Right now. Among us, for us, and excluding none. All the vulnerable, or marginalised, or the rejected or neglected people of our community, and in overseas countries, are those for whom Jesus came to include.

Our attitudes may reveal the truth, whether we’ve embraced the real Jesus or created some sugary substitute that can live easily with our prejudices, both social and party-political. Dare we look honestly at ourselves on this Australia Day weekend? How often are we willing to suffer the discomfort of giving our personal attitudes an honest and thorough examination?

Let’s try a brief audit:

- Are Moslem men, women and children of Arab lands or SE Asia, of lesser value than Australians, New Zealanders, Europeans or Americans?
- Should aborigines be treated as a less worthy group who deserve the bad health and the sad poverty-trap in which many languish?
- Do boat-arriving asylum seekers, including their little children, warrant being shut away behind barbed wire in remote Islands off Australia while their claim to legitimacy is being processed?
- Are prostitutes, drug addicts and street kids, best left to ‘*stew in their own juice*’ rather than the State spending money on their rehabilitation?