

Homily for JACSA Eucharist

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Gospel Luke 4:16-21

In 2013, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of its founding, JAXA developed a three point Action Declaration namely:

- Jubilation for human society: We will provide enjoyment and wonder to people by evolving our lives.
- Aspiration for creation: We will always aim for higher goals and continue to be aspired for creation by facing up to and overcoming any difficulties.
- Responsibility and confidence: We will faithfully act with responsibility and courage to meet confidently the demands of our world.

Sounds familiar – hopefully not. JAXA stands for the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency. We do live in an age of Mission statements. Some are ambitious and pompous; some are glossy and full of conceit. Some are more meaningful and humble. Our Gospel is clearly in this category. Jesus is quoting from Isaiah.

He is engaged – he stands, receives, unrolls, reads, rolls up, hands back, sits down. Always a good step in anything. Then he speaks his sermon. It is simple and straightforward. Today, this is being fulfilled in your hearing. End of sermon.

What is being fulfilled? Each phrase leads us deeper if we reflect.

- Bring good news – not cynicism, anxious flippancy but the joy of a contented person living the joy of the Gospel, a happy person who brings this out in others.
- To the poor – who are the poor? For you, for Australian society, in the world today? Who are the oppressed, the excluded? Sometimes unknown because of our ignorance or apathy. How do we protect ourselves from being with them - retreating to disingenuous justifications or stingy symbolic actions rather than an exposed solidarity and genuine friendship? When Uniya was established thirty years ago, we had a three-point check-in: what do the excluded want? Which of these claims are ethically justified? Which of these are politically achievable?
- Proclaim release to the captives – what does real freedom mean? The Ignatian availability that comes from the demanding personal interior work to carve passion and indifference within our motives.
- What are the prisons? Nauru, Yatala, Long Bay, Port Phillip - but also the crippling prisons of depression, addiction, obsessive self-preoccupation.
- Recovery of sight to the blind – what are our blind spots, our failure to see. Every age has its massive moral blind spots. We might not see them, but our students will, and their children will. How do we help recover that clear and long-sighted vision?
- To proclaim a year of acceptance on the part of the Lord – acceptance, favour. Who needs it most? The refugee and the one seeking asylum, the one who is treated as a stranger in his or her own land - as we open up and discern the book-ends of our cultural story. The disabled - I listened to a podcast recently by Ron McCallum, a law professor and labour law expert who is blind. He spoke of his concern for those in the LGBTQ community. They need to know acceptance and understanding, recognition and reconciliation.
- Acceptance for Luke is a welcome, a hand held out to the afflicted, the trapped and the bound. It is a hospitality that heals and unites – a very important theme in Luke's gospel.

The message is challenging. The script is a big invite. But the message is just a part of this. Something else is at play. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Today this is happening. God has come into our hearts and our community – the program written so long ago by Isaiah is now being enacted.

Today, this is being fulfilled in your hearing. ‘In your hearing’ - this is a bit similar to the phrase – those who have ears to hear. Are we able to listen to God’s murmur about us, to understand that God is with us? The Spirit is upon us. How do we hear? Most of the time it is what is convenient, what we like to listen to. And that can be OK. We encourage our students to surround themselves with loyal and kind friends and wise and caring adults. That is part of finding the good spirit who brings consolation. But it is only one part.

We are also invited to listen to the unusual places, where the need is most great and there is a lack of others to respond. Our mission today involves a special commitment to seek God’s will, to promote discernment, to walk with the poor, to accompany the young, to collaborate in caring for the earth, our common home.

500 years ago, five ships left Spain on a mission to find a route to the Moluccas via the Americas. The journey lasted a fortnight shy of three years. *En route* there were mutinies and shipwrecks. After Magellan was killed half way round, by soldiers of Lapu-Lapu in Cebu, Elcano led the expedition home. Only one of the five ships made the whole journey.

50 years ago next week on July 16, three astronauts set off in Apollo 11 for the Moon. Armstrong and Aldrin climbed into a small vessel, the Eagle, to make a very risky landing and walk on the moon. The resources of NASA surrounded them but they did what no one has done before. Indeed only 10 others have done this since, and none since 1972. 50 years ago, I was in rooms 1 and 2 of the classroom block (which is now the IT room) with the whole senior school (about 250 of us) watching the landing on a small black and white TV at about 10.30 am July 20.

As we consider this Mission of Jesus - of proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom to the imprisoned, sight to the blind, and acceptance to the oppressed, we think a little like those explorers from Portugal and Spain 500 years ago or those astronauts 50 years ago. What is to take such risks and to step so bravely into uncertainty?

What is planned may be quite different to what will happen but that is the nature of a journey. How was Jesus’ message received? The response of the Nazarenes to his sermon was initially favourable but then became condemnatory as they went to throw him from the cliff. That is true for us too. We and our News will not always be received well or at all.

We have to engage with the river, not just build bridges. There are tides to read, currents to drift, waves to surf. Some days our work is easier than others. That is the nature of sacrificial love. We can pray the Prayer for generosity, but every so often, we realize the gift of being able to live the words we pray. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us. Today this is happening. God has come into our hearts and our community. For this, we are truly grateful.