

It's Saturday tea-time.

The rector and curate
are getting the church ready for Sunday,
arranging the altar.

A tramp noisily walks in at the back.

'Go and see what he wants,'
the Rector tells the curate.

A few minutes later the curate returns to the altar.

'Father, he claims he's Jesus Christ.'

The Rector peers at the tramp
from his safe distance in the sanctuary.

'I don't think he is,
but just in case, we'd better look busy.'

How busy did they try to look

on that Sabbath
in that synagogue in Nazareth,
when Jesus rolled in,
as he regularly did,
the ultimate mystery worshipper.
God's ultimate word,
popping up in their midst.

How nervous
was the stuttering and stammering rabbi?

He stood up to read.
At a Shabbat service
there are several readings from the Torah,
with anything between one and eight readers.
They'd keep the Torah,

the sacred books of the Law
in an ark, a tabernacle,
a copy of the Ark of the Covenant
given to Moses and Sinai
and kept in the Holy of Holies in the Temple
at Jerusalem.

Raiders of the Lost Ark sort of stuff.

Yet here in this backwater was Jesus,
the Ark made flesh
in their very midst.

Was he on the order of service,
along with Mrs Brockhurst doing the flowers
and Mr Needham giving out the books
or did he surprise them?

Whatever, they deferred to him.

There would also be readings from the prophets.

They gave him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

Was that at his request,

or was Isaiah in the lectionary,

the set reading for the day?

He unrolled the scroll

and found his text.

Not an easy job with a book,

let alone a scroll.

I used to work for the Archbishop of York,

and having dropped the girls at school,

roll into the chapel just seconds

before the Archbishop began Morning Prayer.

I'd often be down to read the lessons,
and hurriedly turn them up,
only to find some demon
had shuffled Paul's epistles during the night,
and II Thessalonians or Titus
weren't where I expected them to be.

How long was Jesus unrolling and rolling the scroll?

Not one passage, but two:

Isaiah 61:1-2 and

a quick scroll back to Isaiah 58:6.

How quickly did he find it?

Did he fumble,

or did he make a ceremony out of fumbling,

or did he just hit on to it

straight away?

An author always knows
where to find what he has written.

Whatever your take on the Bible,
dictated by God,
inspired by God,
people hearing God right,
people hearing God wrong,
people making God in their own literary image,
Jesus cuts through all that
and goes for the core text, the very heart of God.

No thunder, no floods,
no terrible judgement.

But

Good news for the poor.

Release for captives.

Sight for the blind.

Freedom for the oppressed.

The year of the Lord's favour.

Had they had an overhead screen

linked to PowerPoint

in the Nazareth Synagogue,

(which mercifully they didn't)

AUTHOR'S MESSAGE, AUTHOR'S MESSAGE

would be flashing on it.

'This is the point of it all,'

declares Jesus.

'This is where it's at.

This is where I am at.

This is where you, my body on earth,
should be at.'

Heady stuff.

Good news for the poor,
not our dregs, not our left-overs.

Release for captives,

not

'There, there, it must be terrible in prison,

I hope you get parole.'

Sight for the blind,

not

'They really should have gone to Specsavers.'

Freedom for the oppressed,

Freedom

not bombs

not allowing the markets

to inflict financial ruin on them.

The year of the Lord's favour.

Do we look as if 2022 is the year of the Lord's favour,

or to we put on our miserable face

when we come to church

along with our Sunday suit or posh dress?

Uncompromising stuff.

Impossible stuff,

but that's the agenda he places before us,

his core message,

his heart.

Last week he turned water into wine,

this week

he wants us to embody five things:

good news,

release,

sight,

freedom,

favour.

You are his body here in 2022.

You settle for anything less

and you betray his heart,

you abandon him.

But he does not abandon you.

One of the wonderful things about coming here

is that your priests

and you

really believe,

as I do with all my heart,

that the bread and the wine we share at this Eucharist

really is the body and blood of Christ.

I honestly can't see in any point

in coming, in doing this,

if you don't believe that,

or hope it might be true.

But whatever,

we go out from this Eucharist

with nothing less than the taste of Christ on our lips,

to give people

the taste of Christ in their lives.

Something to think about by Annie Dilliard:

'On the whole I do not find Christians,

outside the catacombs,

sufficiently sensible of the conditions.

Does anybody have the foggiest idea

what sort of power we blithely invoke?

Or as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?

The churches are children playing on the floor

with their chemistry sets,

mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning.

It is madness to wear

ladies straw hats and velvet hats to come to church.

We should all be wearing crash helmets.

Sidesmen should issue

life preservers and signal flares.

They should lash us to our pews.

For the sleeping god may wake some day

and take offence,

or the waking god may draw us

to where we can never return.'

He doesn't abandon us,

he powers us,

he feeds us

to bring good news,

release,

sight,

freedom,

favour.

Go into peace and get on with it.