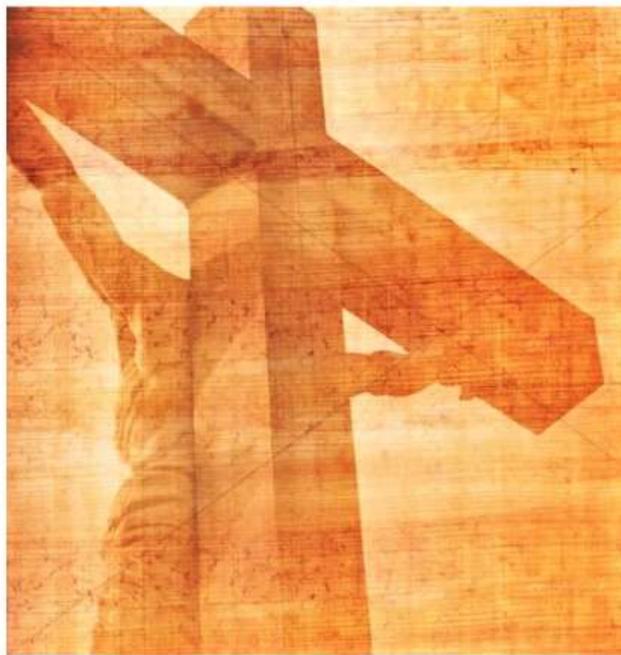


# **FOLLOWING JESUS**

**West Epping Uniting Church  
27<sup>th</sup> January 2019**

**1 Corinthians 12:12-31  
Luke 4:14-30**

**Rev John Barr**



We have heard a lot about who Jesus is – Word made flesh, Light of the World, Good Shepherd, Living Water, The Way the Truth and the Life, Resurrection and the Life.

Last week I spoke about “signs” particularly as they are present in the Gospel of John. But today we encounter another Gospel – the Gospel of Luke. Now, while John acts as a bit of a philosopher, Luke is more practical. Luke gets down to nitty and gritty of things. And that’s why Luke presents the account of Jesus speaking the synagogue in Nazareth in his works.

This is because Jesus not only makes yet another claim here concerning who he is – and that related to Old Testament prophecy and the promise of a Messiah – Jesus maps out what he is going to do!

And that is to - bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to those who are captive. Offer sight to those who are blind and to give freedom to those who crushed, put down and oppressed.

In other words, Jesus announces he is going to be a bit of a revolutionary. Jesus declares he will challenge a system that exploits the vulnerable and grows fat of the sweat of those who have no choice but to work themselves into the ground.

Jesus is going to take on those forces which tear down, dehumanize and have no respect for the other.

Moreover, Jesus is going challenge those who pull the wool over their eyes, who live fanciful, illusionary lives where they fail to see or acknowledge the reality around them.

Friends in this passage we read from Luke’s Gospel, Jesus makes it quite clear what his mission is all about – it’s about valuing all people, it’s about freeing people and it’s about bringing all people to their full God-given potential.

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Now while Jesus is announcing what his ministry is all about, Paul, is writing to the Christian community in ancient Corinth and in this letter today Paul makes the point that following Jesus is not a business that is to be taken lightly. To be a follower of Jesus is not like taking up a subscription ticket to the opera or a season ticket to the footy. It's not like joining the local club or even being a paid-up member of a union, a syndicate or a political organization.

Friends, to be a follower of Jesus is to take on and live what Jesus claims to be. And that is for us to also challenge those things that devalue and dehumanize others. It is to reach out to the vulnerable and the poor and to say they matter. It is to allow ourselves to see things for what they really are and to not let personal prejudices, fears or ambitions cloud our thinking or shape our actions.

Paul says all this by offering an image. And that image is the body. Here Paul speaks about one body with many members. And each member comes together to do the work of Jesus and to be Christ to others. In other words, following Jesus means coming together as a community and being, together, the hands and feet of Jesus in the world today.

We have probably heard all this before. But it bears repeating. Its needs to be repeated over and over again. It must be because it's essential to who we are as the church today.

You are the body of Christ! Yes you, each one of you together are the body of Christ. You are called, collectively, to be Christ in this world, to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour – or to put it in Eugene Peterson's contemporary rendering of the text:

**"God's Spirit is upon me; he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor, Sent me 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!"**

And friends, as you do this remember the thing defines who Jesus is and what Jesus does is the cross. While crucifixion under the power of Rome was an ugly, hideous, brutal thing, the cross is the focus of who we are because it speaks of a love that is so generous, so abundant and so mind blowing. It's a love that seeks nothing in return. It's a love that gives all. It's a love that says everyone matters. It's a love that doesn't pretend or create delusions of grandeur or covet power and privilege. It's a love that reflects the true nature of God who is gracious, compassionate and merciful.

So, friends, you are called to be the body of Christ in the world, a people who are the hands and feet of Jesus, a people who are shaped and formed by the kind of love we see in the cross.

This is not a message of triumph or success. The Good News is not a pass to an easy life. But it is an invitation to live life the way God intends, it is a summons to be the people God created us to be.

(3)

And when we do this, when we are the body of Christ in the world, a people formed and shaped by the cross, God comes to us with the assurance that nothing can stop us, nothing can overwhelm us. Nothing can destroy us. Being the people God intends to be and doing the things God calls us to do, no matter how risky, how scary and how challenging they may appear, is all we need to be.

For in this comes resurrection hope. In this is our future where light overcomes darkness, where life vanquishes death and good defeats evil. This is the future of West Epping. This is the future of the church.

As I speak to you on my last Sunday in placement, this is my prayer for you. Don't concern yourselves too much about numbers, programs and finances. Yes, they are important. But what's most important is that we hear the voice of Jesus, that we be faithful to his calling, that we be his body in the world, that we be a body, a community, church, that is truly formed and shaped by the vulnerability, the risk and the love of the cross.

And when we do these things everything else will fall into place.

Amen.

