

**SERMON SUMMARY**  
**3rd of Advent**  
**11th December 2011**

- The Bible, it must be said, is a fairly unwieldy set of writings to get to grips with.
- If we are put off by the sheer scope of the OT, we can always start with a passage like Isaiah 61.
- Luke, after his accounts of Jesus' birth and youth, uses this very passage (albeit in a slightly different translation) to launch Jesus' public ministry when he reads from it in the synagogue at Capernaum (Luke 4). He makes it Jesus' manifesto.
- As such it is worth our considering how what we do as a church compares with this manifesto offered by Jesus. We tend to be good at the work of the Spirit and anointing because that is church-y. Otherwise, we are a bit like Canada's national motto (*desiderantes meliorem patriam* – desiring a better country) which Mark Steyn archly translated as "Canada- work in progress".
- We always need to be asking who are the prisoners, the oppressed, and what we are doing for them
- When the church is at its worst, we tend to be judgmental in our attitudes, adopting a "holier-than-thou" attitude.
- HIV/AIDS provides a recent example: initial church reactions were often highly judgmental, but, thankfully, "work in progress" has meant an evolution to care rather than judgment, even if we do not condone the behaviours often involved in the transmission of the virus.
- Our reading of texts like Isaiah necessarily has a social and political dimension, and it is important that we import the values of our Christian heritage into contemporary society.
- It is often said that we are alienated from society because of an ideological dispute. This might be the case in societies where there is a noticeably strong ideology, such as Islam, but I am not so sure that this is the case in modern Australia.
- It seems often that we are engaging not with a hostile ideology, but with a vacuum.
- Nasty things happen around vacuums. The great Swiss theologian Karl Barth wrote in the vacuum caused by the loss of hope and resources which followed the First World War, trying to fill the void with a return, in modern form, to orthodox Christian beliefs, often called Neo-Orthodoxy.
- As he wrote the vacuum left in Central Europe was filled with National Socialism and fascism (some would also add Communism). Barth wrote furiously against movements of this kind, and was forced to leave Germany for exile in Switzerland.
- One of his most famous aphorisms was that preachers should read with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. This allows us to speak prophetically, and with Christ-like voice, amidst the vacuous sound-bites which dominate so much contemporary political discourse. Listening to the news often makes me feel like one of the wretched farm animals in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, unable to see any difference between their old and new political leaders.
- If we wish seriously to fill the void in contemporary thinking with the values of Christ, we might watch the news with Isaiah 61 in mind, to guide our own attitudes, actions and social action.

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