

October 5, 2025

Paul Purdue preaching

On this world Communion Sunday, as I preach in English and Hai Htoo and Wisinee translate into Karen, there will be moments where you may have to wait until someone says something you understand. Could we take these slower moments and practise loving our neighbors as ourselves? Maybe we could do some holy day dreaming as we wait, drifting deeper into the Word of God in the delays between words?.

Imagine this scene in Luke 4, where Jesus comes back home to Nazareth. What makes a place our hometown or homeland? Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem. Jesus was unhoused in Bethlehem.

Joseph likely found work on King Herod's massive public works project, renovating the Jerusalem Temple. They moved into a house for maybe 2 years, before fleeing as refugees to Egypt. Would you imagine Jesus as a refugee child living in Cairo or Alexandria?

Jesus spoke Greek, Arameic, and Hebrew and perhaps a few words in Coptic. Do you think of Jesus as a global citizen? Do we see the world like Jesus, a trilingual refugee, living in the biggest cities and rural foothills?

Did God love the world so much, that God became a refugee, not from one place but a global citizen: a home in Israel and in Egypt, the capital and the countryside, Greek and Hebrew, Arameic and Egyptian?

Who is Jesus our Lord? Just like every Saturday Jesus went to synagogue. Jesus had been in the wilderness for 40 days fasting and praying: clarifying his mission. What message will launch Jesus' ministry?

The rabbi surely smiled to see Jesus back home. Since childhood, Jesus had been a gifted and faithful student of the Torah. (Luke 4) Jesus was now a well educated tradesperson. The rabbi takes the Isaiah scroll from the Tabernacle. The scroll is leather, about 30 feet long, and written by hand. Without the invention of the printing press, this scroll is one of a precious few books in town. If you wanted to read the Bible, you had to go to your church or synagogue. Early Christians memorized the teaching and stories of Jesus, "hiding the word of God in their hearts". (Psalm 119) Jesus unrolls the scroll and reads aloud from two separate chapters: Isaiah 58 and 61. There are 31,000 verses in the Bible Jesus could choose from, which verses did Jesus use to launch his ministry?

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
God has anointed me to bring good news to poor people.  
God has sent me to release captives, help people see, and end oppression.  
God has sent me to proclaim the year of the Lord’s Jubilee, when debts are forgiven.

As we get our first look at Jesus, who do we see? What did Jesus come to do? Jesus’ first sermon calls us to bring good news to poor people, release prisoners, offer free healthcare, end oppression, and forgive debts. Leviticus 25 describes the year of the Lord as a time of economic Justice for those who “face financial difficulties”. Jesus sits down to teach, “today, as you listen these words are being fulfilled.”

Who is Jesus? What did Jesus come to do? How do we read Scripture and see the world? Maybe on this World Communion Sunday we might remember to see Jesus through a global lens? We might remember to bring good news to immigrants and refugees? Will might work for affordable healthcare and decent housing for all? We might work for debt relief and economic justice? Perhaps, we might push out beyond the shallow end of self-help, self-service, and helping-ourselves into the riskier seas of loving our neighbors, the stranger and even our opponents. Today, let us live into Jesus’s first sermon by seeing strangers and neighbors through a lens of justice and love. Amen.