

“There’s more than meets the eye.”

So the saying goes.

What looks like a small, unassuming café – tucked away in an unfashionable part of town – turns out to serve the most deliciously mouth-watering food.

What looks like the chance encounter of two strangers – who’ve just met for the first time – turns out to be the start of a treasured, life-long friendship.

What looks like the local carpenter – turning up one Sabbath at the Synagogue in Nazareth – turns out to be the beginning of a ministry –  
that will draw crowds of thousands –  
to hear this charismatic man – Jesus.



“There’s more than meets the eye.”

If you’d been there that particular morning – you’d have seen and heard the usual first century Jewish worship:

the Shemā – the confession of faith –

the Ten Commandments –

the eighteen benedictions –

the reading of some Psalms – and

other passages of Scripture.

And after that – people would’ve been asked to speak –

each one standing to read –

and sitting to teach –

as was the custom.

Among them is Jesus – who chooses a popular passage – from the prophet Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...”

These words foretell – a future time – of blessing, prosperity and peace.

But now – as he starts his ministry – Jesus claims that this time of blessing is no longer far off ...

It is arriving here – today – with *him*.



This is one of those typically remarkable stories of Jesus.

Except ...

“There’s more than meets the eye.”

For this is also a story of the Holy Spirit.

That's very appropriate for us –  
at this time in the Church's year – between the Ascension and Pentecost –  
when we remember the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles.

So ...

“There's more than meets the eye.”

Because this is a story about the Spirit.

When Jesus begins to speak in the Synagogue – his opening words are:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ...”

This ministry – upon which Jesus is about to embark ...

It's *not* undertaken in his own strength –  
rather it's a work empowered the Holy Spirit of God.

In many ways – this was nothing new.

Right from the very moment of creation – the Spirit has been present and active in the world.

In the beginning ... Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

All down the years – the Holy Spirit continued as an active presence –

in empowering – equipping – anointing individuals.

Joshua, son of Nun – was filled with the Spirit –

when Moses had laid his hands on him.

Samson – was given superhuman strength –

when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power.

It was the Spirit –

that inspired David in composing his Psalms of praise – worship – and lament.

It was by the power of the Holy Spirit –

that the Virgin Mary conceived and gave birth to a son.

And that work of empowerment –

the story of God's Holy Spirit –

continues in today's reading from Luke's Gospel.

In fact – it doesn't just *continue* ...

The Spirit's work reaches a momentous highpoint –

in anointing *Jesus* for the ministry upon which he's about to embark ...

Just as next week – on Pentecost Sunday –

we'll recall how the same Spirit anoints and empowers the *Apostles* –  
for *their* new ministry.



So this is a story about Jesus.

And it's also a story about the Holy Spirit.

Except ...

“There’s more than meets the eye.”

For this is a story of the Creator God.

It’s a story that begins in the opening pages of the Bible – at the start of all things.

There we read that God looks at the world –

at *all* of creation –

and sees that it is very good.

Everything that God has made – is just as God intends ...

sun, moon and stars –

plants and everything that grows –

animals and birds –

and all living creatures.

Each one is just as God wants it to be.

And above all – human beings are made in God’s own image – to live in peace in harmony ...

with one another –

with creation – and

with God.

But – of course – things don’t stay like that.

As a result of – human arrogance and weakness and sin ...

all this has been lost – and we live in a world that’s

damaged – divided – and broken.

Now this brokenness troubles the Creator God – who looks with sorrow on our suffering world.

For God *cares!*

And God is determined to put things right again – bringing –

healing and wholeness –

freedom and salvation –

new life and hope.

And so – through his ministry – Jesus takes on God’s work of restoring – all that he encounters – that’s broken ...

feeding –

comforting –

liberating and –

offering to those who will receive it – new and abundant life.

This is a life-changing – world-changing – work of –

renewal and restoration –

reconciliation and release ...

so that – all who draw near through him –

might be drawn into a loving relationship with the Creator God.

Which is where today’s reading comes in.

For when Jesus stands up and declares:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...”

He’s confidently announcing that the Creator God’s ultimate purposes –  
are reaching their climax and fulfilment – through him.

He – Jesus – is God’s agent of – salvation and redemption –  
for the whole world.



So what we have here is a story of Jesus.

But it’s *also* a story of the Holy Spirit.

*And* it’s a story of the Creative Father.

Three persons – yet one God –

in a single saving enterprise –

of bringing new life and hope to our troubled world.

It is – you might say – a Trinitarian story of salvation.

*Except* – even then ...

“There’s more than meets the eye.”

For this story is our story.

Or – at least – it *can* be.

For – when we hear Jesus speak of –

good news for the poor –

release for the captives –

wholeness for broken –

freedom for the oppressed –

comfort – joy – and God’s favour ...

When we hear Jesus speak ...

Those blessings are *not just* for the people of Nazareth 2,000 years ago –  
those blessings could all be *ours – here – today*.

The only question is ...

Whether we recognise our need for all the God is offering us –

through Jesus Christ –

by the Spirit –

Will we recognise our desperate need?

And will we eagerly respond?



Back in the late 1980s – I took part in a number of parish missions.

Each time we were invited by a church somewhere in the UK –  
with the hope that – through a week-long mission –  
people might come to faith –  
as we shared with them the Christian Good News.

There were two of these missions that I remember in particular.

On *both* these missions – we spoke in schools – and ran events in local community centres –  
pubs and cafes.

On *both* these missions – people invited us into their homes to talk to families, friends and  
neighbours.

On *both* these missions – our time concluded – on the Sunday evening – with a great service of  
celebration.

And at this service – the preacher asked all those who wanted to respond to the Christian Good  
News to stand.

These missions were – in many ways – much the same.

But there was one vital difference.

At the *first* – remarkably – over 50 people stood up in response ...  
50 people. – It was amazing!

At the *second* – there was hardly anyone.

Maybe two or three – stood in response.

But certainly no more than that.

Almost *nobody* was interested.

So what made the difference?

It was nothing *we* did.

It was all about where *we went*.

Rather – the *first* mission was to a run-down housing estate – a place with high unemployment  
and social deprivation.

It was a place where people knew only too well their need for Good News – for –  
healing and wholeness –  
freedom and salvation –  
new life and hope.

And the *second* mission?

Well, that was to a leafy, well-to-do suburb – where people had –  
big houses –  
big cars –  
big salaries – and  
probably equally big egos.

It was a place where few people recognised – any need at all – for Good News – for –  
their lives to be touched and transformed by God.



The difference between these two very different experiences – came down to one thing:

Did these people want to make *this* story –

    this story of Jesus announcing God's blessing of deliverance ...

        Do they want to make *this* story *their* story?

And what about us?

Do we see ourselves as the ones needing –

    God's blessings –

    healing and salvation –

    deliverance and rescue –

    hope and new life ...?

Do we recognise *our* need for –

    our lives to be transformed –

    so that we might know the loving relationship with God ...

        that Jesus brings...?

Or are we perfectly happy and comfortable as we are? – thank you very much!



“There's more than meets the eye.”

As the saying goes.

That's very true of this evening's reading from Luke's Gospel.

What looks like *just* a story of the local carpenter speaking in the Synagogue –

    turns out to be God's – astonishing, Spirit-empowered mission –

        to bring healing and hope to the whole world.

“There's more than meets the eye.”

As the saying goes.

And that could be very true of *us* this evening ...

    if *God's* story has become *our* story.

For when other people look at us –

    they may not see anything particularly special or remarkable or out of the ordinary.

But if only they could look below the surface –

    they'd see how our lives are being transformed – as *we* are –

        healed and forgiven –

        saved and set free –

        filled with new life and hope –

            by our awesome –

            Trinitarian God.

**The Revd Canon Dr Tim Bull**