Epiphany 4 2 February, 2025 HRUC 9.30am

**Psalm 71; I Corinthians 13: 1-13; Luke 4: 20 - 30**

**JESUS OF NAZARETH - A DANGEROUS MAN**

**Introduction:** What would you do if Jesus came to Canterbury? I expect you think we’d welcome him with open arms; eager to listen to what he had to say; take him home for lunch; tell our friends to come and see this amazing man everyone’s talking about. I mean he’d be an ‘A List’ celebrity wouldn't he??

That’s why this morning’s reading from Luke’s gospel is so strange. Why did the crowd at the synagogue in Nazareth, his own home town after all, find him so offensive they tried to throw him off a cliff?

**1. The Nazareth Incident:** Yes they did! Even though everyone at first was impressed at how well he spoke. They chirped about what a good preacher he was and how meaningful the sermon was and how surprised they were to hear such wise and eloquent words coming out of his mouth. After all, he was a local lad - they said, **Is not this Joseph's son? The local carpenter’s boy?**

But then things begin to get a bit nasty. As what he said sinks home they get so worked up about what he was saying, that they try to grab him and throw him off the cliff at the local quarry! Things get nasty because Jesus tells them in no uncertain terms that God is not on their side. He dares to suggest that God's love includes foreigners and enemies and illustrates it with two stories from the Hebrew Scriptures, the same Scriptures he had just read from and that you and I read from on Sundays.

It was only a few weeks ago that we were singing our wonder at the child in the manger, loved by Mary, adored by shepherds,worshipped by Magi. Luke now shows us that this child grew up to be a radically subversive preacher whom everyone thought was too dangerous to live because he claimed that what ***he*** said and did, expresses what ***God*** says and does.

**2. A Dangerous Man?** Have you ever, in this place of peace and calm, considered Jesusa dangerous man? Let me try and show you why Jesus is dangerous and more offensive to society than Grace Tame and her T-shirt in our own time.

(a) Jesus was not only the friend of sinners, he dared to ***forgive*** them, and so claimed to do what only God has the power to do. He openly taught that those who were sure they were the good people, who obeyed God's law, they would be excluded and judged when the Kingdom of God came. He went further and said that sinners who have obviously not obeyed God's law would be forgiven and welcomed by God in that Kingdom. The religious people of the time, especially the religious leaders and socially elite condemned him as a heretical blasphemer; a destroyer of Israel's traditions and morality, the very fabric of society. Is this your Jesus?

(b) Jesus was also the friend of the wrong people, socially and politically. He befriended women whom no respectable man would have anything to do with unless they were members of their own family. He broke social morality codes and conventions by openly speaking to women in public (John 4). He included them among those he taught; (Luke 10: 38-42) a puzzle even to his own disciples (Luke 8: 1-3). He was the friend of the poor and oppressed in society. He publicly claimed he was anointed to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives and liberate the oppressed. To the civil and religious authorities and to respectable society, he was a rabble rouser and revolutionary who disturbed the peace and destroyed law and order. Definitely not proper indeed!

(c) But the ordinary people who longed for liberation from the oppression of Rome, the ruling authority, did not understand him either. They wanted a Messiah who would start a holy war to wipe out their enemies. Much like the situation we see from both Hamas and the State of Israel in the Middle East today. But Jesus refused to use violence to achieve the justice he proclaimed. He taught and practised ***love***for the enemy. Try that message in any of the warring countries today. No wonder those ordinary people in the Nazareth congregation finally joined the religious and political leaders in wanting to get rid of him. They would in the end join the crowds who shouted, - **Crucify him!**

(d) But it gets worse - even his own disciples were disappointed in him. They had hoped that following him would bring them personal power, influence, privilege and success when his Kingdom came (Mark 8: 35-38). But he said that anyone who followed him would experience rejection, suffering, persecution and even a death like his own. When his disciples saw this come true, and the victors hoisted Jesus up on a cross, his closest disciples all deserted him – except the women!

In the end, ***everyone*** rejected him - rich and poor, conservative and liberal and revolutionaries, pious and pagan, enemies and friends. Why? Because Jesus is not the sweet, harmless, "mythological" figure of Sunday school lessons and churchly sermons. He was a real human being and a very dangerous man to anyone who thought that God was on their side and that he could be enlisted for their political, social or religious cause. That’s why the Bishop of Washington’s sermon so offended President Trump at his inauguration. She spoke to the President about the Jesus of the gospels, not the culturally acceptable Jesus of popular culture.

**3. Why is this man dangerous to us?** Jesus is dangerous precisely because he refuses to be categorized; captive to any ideology. For those who supported law and order, he was a provocateur. He disappointed the revolutionaries by his non-violent love of peace and commitment to justice. On the other hand, he offended the pious, self-righteous, ‘nice’ people by his uninhibited worldliness. After all, he was accused of being a drunkard because he partied with the outcasts and sinners. For the devout he was too worldly and for the noisy compromisers with the world, he was too quiet; too strict for the gentle and too gentle for the strict.

And what about us? O, be sure he will likely offend us too if we fail to see the Jesus of the Gospel and link ourselves to the Jesus of religion. Perhaps we don't pay enough attention to who Jesus really is - our practiced religion goes on regardless, because it doesn't really matter who Jesus is. So much modern religious life is so centered on us and our needs and so long as our day by day needs continue to be more or less met, we don't much care about Jesus. Except as a symbol, of course. He is a convenient symbol of human longing and spirituality - of all that is best in the human heart - or something like that.

And those of us who may be offended by what we did last Sunday morning in mourning and lament for what the so called “Christian” colonisers of this country did when they invaded and appropriated the land of the indigenous people. We who will not admit that we who occupied and took possession of this country without recompence may well be offended by Jesus too. For the Jesus of the gospel, love is the expression of justice, particularly for those who are powerless in the face of the brute force of the powerful.

But Jesus is more than a symbol. He is more than a cipher in the pages of history; more than a great religious leader or teacher. More than our dear departed leader whom we struggle to remember, but continue to work to keep his movement alive in our difficult times. Jesus is God acting for every human being and that the love and grace we see in Jesus is God's gift to everyone, regardless of their worthiness. He is the Saviour of those who have no other hope.

That is why he is such a dangerous man.