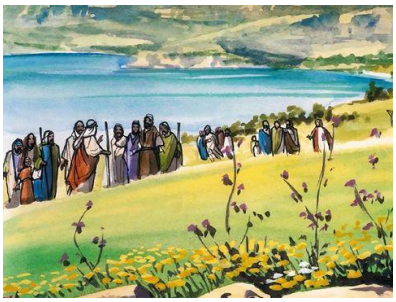
A LIFE CHANGED AND PRESERVED

Luke 4:16-31

It's strange how a sequence of events can change one's life completely, - all the more amazing when it happens so suddenly, completely unsought, yet now seen as God's tender care and plan.

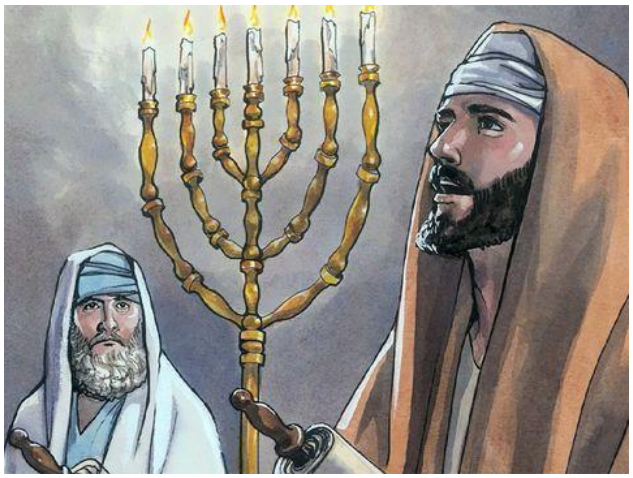
I'd known Jesus for many years, - we were at the same school, and I also knew him from our worshipping at the local synagogue. He had built a reputation as one who knew the scriptures so well, - unlike the scribes and pharisees that knew them by heart, but Jesus, he knew them *from* the heart! Even when at school, when he talked about the prophets, it was almost as if he had stood by them and witnessed everything they did! It wasn't just words with him, but he conveyed an understanding beyond his years. His knowledge of scripture was simply amazing, - from as far back as I can remember!

I can't say he had many friends, rather he was friendly with everyone, friendly in an unassuming way, genuine interest, but no one greater than any other. My friends and I teased him, but it never touched him, - he'd just look at us and smile. I sometimes caught him on his own, but there'd be no recrimination, - he's just chat as though nothing adverse had ever happened, there was never any spite in him.



We went our separate ways. I became, like many from the school, a simple fisherman, he a well-respected carpenter. But most people got to know him from his regular attendance at the local synagogue. He would read the scriptures, whatever script or scroll he was given, and I know many people who made an extra effort to be there whenever he was reading.

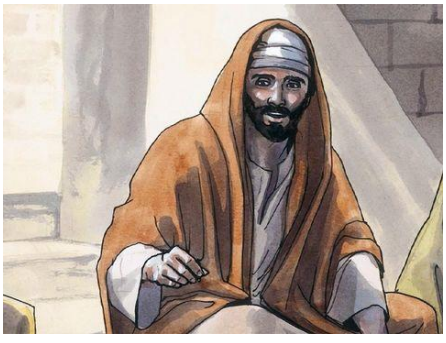
He was now getting to be well known for preaching and teaching all round Galilee, being much acclaimed, - which was no surprise to me. And I was there this day when he came back to Nazareth, to the synagogue where I had watched him so many times before. Our Priest and Levite had both spoken, and then Jesus was asked to read, being given the book of the prophet Esaias. He stood up, as usual, looked for the words he wanted to find, and began to read therefrom:



"The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

What memories it brought back to me, - his clear voice reaching effortlessly across every corner of the synagogue. He closed the book, gave it back to the minister, sat down. We were in awe of the power and graciousness of his words. Everyone was watching him, expectant, hearing prophecy.

He looked round at all of us. He spoke again: **"This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."**



Fulfilled? Nay! Surely not here and now! There was a buzz of comments, - he was after all just a carpenter, Joseph's son, - how can he speak with such authority / knowledge?? Surely he cannot be talking about himself! He's only one of us, a simple Nazarene! What God would anoint him? He continued speaking, as if in reply to our thoughts:

"Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months,

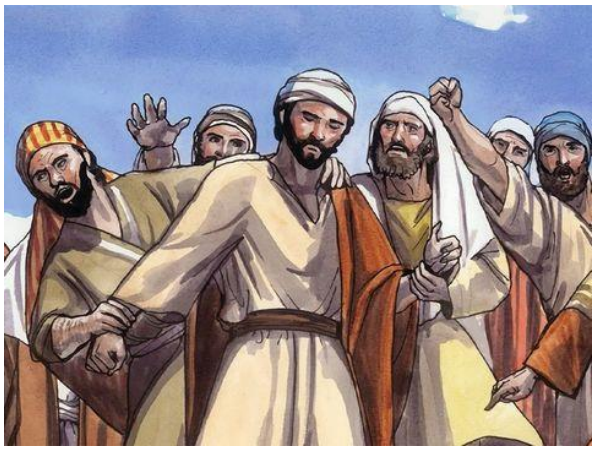
when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, *a city* of Sidon, unto a woman *that was* a widow."



We began to look at one another, - did we hear him right, - He's favouring the Gentiles over the Jews! The mood in the synagogue was changing rapidly!

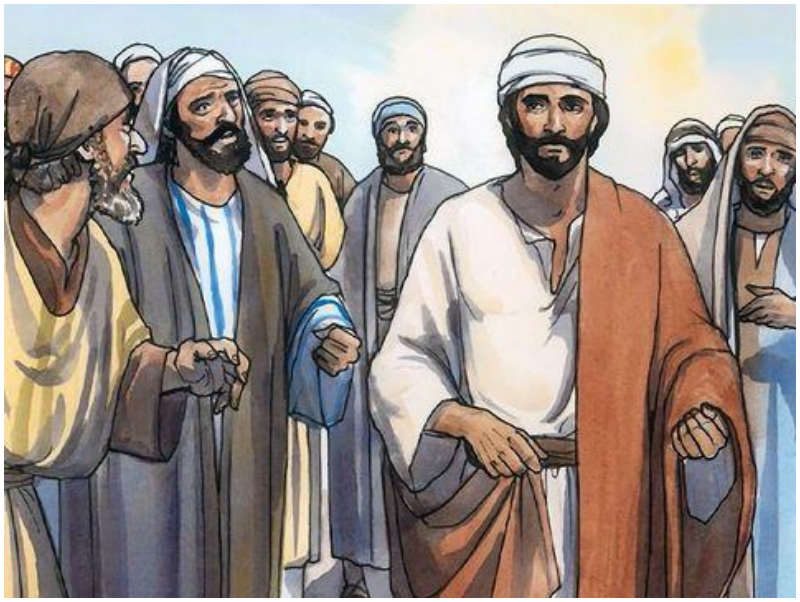
"And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian."

Hey, I am a Jew and proud of it! The head priest and Levite both threw up their arms, shouting abuse. The Levite turned to us all, declaiming Jesus, invoking us to show our righteous indignation, - how dare he, HOW DARE HE! No matter how long I had known him, - he had no right to come to our synagogue, exalt the Gentiles and insult us. I found myself at the front of a mob, forcibly lifting him up from where he was sitting, pushing him, shouting, insulting him, - the Priest and the Levite were also shouting, yelling "To the cliff! to the cliff!", - and that's where we drove him. It wasn't far. The edge of the cliff came rapidly in sight, the sheer drop obvious, nearer, nearer, five more steps and he'd be gone, and I was set to push him at the last.



Jesus turned round.

I'll never know to this day how he did it. But now there he was, facing me, facing all the others. He was so calm, he shewed no stress, but stood still just for a moment. There was such a sense of peace. Oh, dear friends, he looked at me, no recrimination, no accusation, how can I say this, I just felt pure love, a purer love than I had ever known, that simply reached right through me. I stopped in my tracks, unable to use force, because his love was more powerful, all-powerful. In those milliseconds of time, I thought back to my memories of this man, his knowledge of Scripture, what he had said "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears". He was anointed of God, and how could I take his life? Goodness was all-powerful. With brief horror I realised I had tried to kill this man! Equally quickly, came the knowledge this could never have happened. He had his work to do. God was with him, and yes was also with me! Lives had been preserved. The animal impetus that was driving us all forward had gone. Just stopped. My thoughts were still whirling! I recalled the storms I had faced on the Galilean Sea, the mighty waves, - oh can you imagine those waves rushing in and suddenly collapsing into stillness, not even a ripple, no other waves at all, just stillness. Jesus was now walking right through what had been, seconds before, a howling mob. I felt his love, even more strongly. I followed behind him, glancing at the faces of those I knew so well from the synagogue. They looked lost, as though they had forgotten why they were there, what had driven them there. The whipped-up hatred had gone, vanished! The Priest and the Levite were dumbstruck, and as Jesus moved toward them, they parted and let him through, exchanging their own glances of bewilderment. They were powerless! Jesus kept walking. The crowd dispersed, - no shouting, no loud voices, but a gentle persistent "What's happened!" an awareness that whatever it was it had been and was special. Two of my friends were following me back down the hill. Jesus's



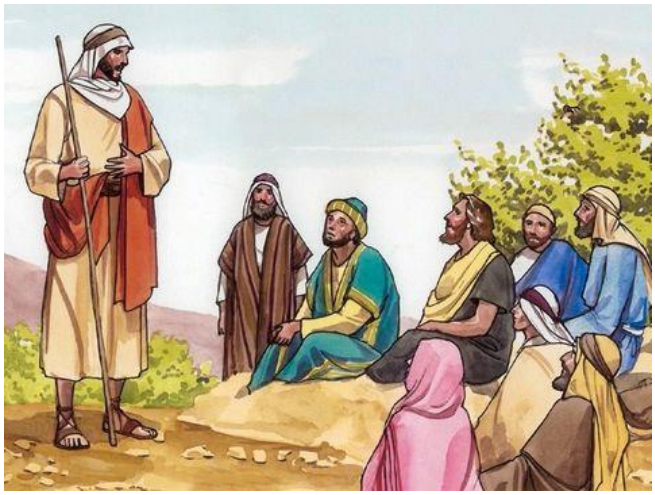
words kept resonating: “He hath sent me to heal, to preach, to set at liberty, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord..” I now felt within me: “Jesus is the anointed”.

It suddenly all made sense. All those years I had known him, his complete trust in God now so evident, and I realised so typical. He had come of age in, how dare I even say this, in the most natural way, and there was nothing would prevent him fulfilling his role in Scripture. I felt humbled. I felt the power of Love and of Truth, a love of Scripture I did not know was possible.

I continued walking some distance behind him, with my two friends. We had nearly killed someone we had known for so many years, caught up in the frenzy of mob rule. But we had experienced the power of Love, Love that was somehow always in control, love that was blessing us now. Relief, and love and gratitude swamped over me. A flash thought ran through me of David and Abigail, her love saving David from slaughtering many. The love of Jesus had also saved me, saved us. I clasped the hands of my friends, pulled them towards me , and we hugged each other so tight! Our lives has been preserved. Love had overcome. Jesus was only twenty yards distant, - I shouted out “Thank you “ as loud as I could, my friends joined in.

He turned, and the same love I felt when he turned on the cliff top shone yet again from him. He beckoned us to join him, and when we reached, he held our hands. He knew our thoughts.

We walked together on to Capernaum, he sharing the Holy Scriptures as he had ever done, and we drank it all in.



My life has changed.

I live in full obedience to Holy Scripture, in obedience to my Lord Jesus. I was saved from violence, and I now follow my Master with fullness of joy.

He has revealed to me my true nature, and the power of unconditional Love. I have been so blessed, and my life is preserved in God’s love for man.

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