Our passage opens on an ordinary Saturday morning in Nazareth.

Well perhaps not so ordinary. The synagogue was full – special occasion this. Jesus, who had been brought up in the town had been away for a while. He’d shut up his carpenters workshop and left to travel to the area around the Sea of Galilee. But now he was back and had become a preacher with a growing reputation for excellent teaching. And, part way through the service, up he stood to read from scripture.

Have you ever wondered how Jesus must have felt just before he stood up to read these words from Isaiah? Excited, scared, full of anticipation, knowing he was starting on the road that would lead to the cross inside three years? Perhaps some of those emotions.

I was talking with someone recently who spent some time earlier this year living and working in Palestine. He told me about the many of the Palestinian men he had met who had no formal education. They only had the skills they learned from their fathers - which made finding a job in a different area of work tricky.

That resonated – as a man, Jesus would have had the skills of a carpenter, learned as an apprentice to Joseph but probably little in the way of formal education. So economically, to step out as an itinerant preacher, would have meant leaving behind the trade he knew with its ability to generate an income. To leave security, home, familiarity, friends to step onto a road which would lead to conflict, misunderstanding, arrest and death must, at the very least, have felt a bit scary.

But the point was he couldn’t stay where he was. His life’s work was to be about so much more than training to be a really good carpenter. That was no more than a step on the way - not the destination.

So up he stands, reads the passage, gives the scroll back to the attendant and then sits down to speak as was the custom in those days. There is a chair up here but I don’t think I’ll try that.

He says this – today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

And that is some claim.

Let’s look at the first couple of lines of that quote from Isaiah:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me

because he has anointed me

In the Old Testament, the spirit of the Lord being upon someone or resting on them was a sign that God was giving them special wisdom and capacity. They are words used of those, who God is calling into particular roles of leadership. And they are quite a diverse bunch.

Included are those called to be leaders of God’s people, leaders in their places of work, designers and craftspeople and prophets.

God’s call is not restricted to particular types of people or those in specific occupations. God’s can call anybody. And none of his followers is exempt from receiving his call.

Those listening that day in the Synagogue would have know their scriptures well and you can imagine how the excitement must have grown when Jesus claimed these as words which applied to him.
But he went on to make a second big claim:

Because he has anointed me. Now the stakes were getting much higher.

Anointing – that was what you did for kings and in particular two kings. Saul and then David.

1 Samuel 16 v13 says this – Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers ; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.

No wonder the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Was Jesus really claiming to be a king? What did that mean? Was it safe to do so with the eyes and ears of Rome all around them? And not just the Romans, what was King Herod Antipas going to make of it?

They didn’t yet understand that this king was not seeking earthly power but heralding the arrival of a new kingdom, the kingdom of God. A new covenant with his people and with it, a way made for restoration of relationship with God. A hope of salvation as the prophets of Israel had proclaimed.

As the reading goes on, Jesus sets out his manifesto.

He’s come to take action. He is going to:

bring good news
proclaim release
heal
break down oppression
herald the Lord’s favour

He also makes it clear that these are tasks given to him. He’s been sent:

But he’s not been sent by Caesar or any other earthly ruler.

He’s coming because he has been sent by the King of kings and Lord of Lords. His work is the enactment of God’s great plan for salvation. The longing in the heart of God for restored relationship with sinful man coming to pass.

And Jesus is specific about whom he has been sent to – the poor, the captives, the sick, the oppressed, those who need to hear that God is for them, that God stands with them, that God cares passionately about justice and freedom and health and relationship.

And his words work at two levels.

One way of reading them is to see them in terms of bringing good news to those who are captive to sin, to spiritual blindness and oppression. Another is to see them in terms of our call to work against the practices of this word which are unfair, unjust and cause misery and oppression and grinding poverty and wholly preventable sickness.

God cares passionately about both ways of looking at this passage. He cares about both our salvation and our working with Him to change this broken world.

Jesus was clear about his call. How about you?

Do you have a manifesto?
Do you have a clear sense of what God is calling you to do?

How well are you doing at being good news to the people in the place where you live, the places where you work, socialise, pursue your sports and hobbies?

The great West screen of this Cathedral means that we can’t be a hidden worshiping community here. We can see the city and the people of the city can see us. And it is a city of need. 10,000 of our fellow Coventrians, that’s 5% of the workforce are currently on job seekers allowance. An estimate of the total number of people out of work puts this figure at nearer 15,000. And that is before the spending review this week. There is talk of 1,000 job losses at the City Council.

In the year to August, West Midlands police recorded nearly 30,000 crimes in the city.

Big numbers but each of them represent individual men and women who need to know the love of God in their lives.

Teresa of Avila wrote this – yours are the eyes through which to look out Christ’s compassion to the world.

But as soon as we start to think about getting involved, unhelpful thoughts start running through our heads. Are you hearing any of these?

The age lie – I am too young, too old, at the wrong stage of life

The ability lie – I have absolutely nothing in the way of skills and abilities to bring

The availability lie – I am far too busy to spend any time getting involved.

If we fall for any of them, we can end up thoroughly neutralised.

The truth is that those who God calls, He also equips for the works of service to which he directs us

So what could the first steps be?

Is God putting a name into your mind of someone for whom you need to pray every day?

Is there someone you know who would welcome a friendly word or action?

Is there a course of action you’ve know for ages that God is prompting you to take but fear and the busyness of life have got in the way of you taking that scary next step?

Perhaps the reading from Isaiah resonated with you1. Is today the day when you need to take the step of accepting Jesus as your Lord and Saviour? You’ve heard the good news of the gospel and want to accept it and you know God is calling you but have never taken the step of commitment.

If God is speaking to you this morning about the next step on your journey with him, please don’t leave without doing something about it. Ask someone to pray with you or speak to one of the clergy after the service.

God has a perfect plan for each of us to follow. Don’t miss out on adventure he has mapped out for you.

Amen.