

Mission Possible

Luke 4:14-21
1 Cor 12:12-31a

I wonder if you've seen any of the Mission Impossible films which have been box office hits over the past 25 years or so? (Apparently some of the footage for the next instalment was filmed in a Birmingham shopping centre, so if you are an aficionado, look out for that!) I have to confess that I've not seen any of the movies, but that I do remember the TV series which introduced the theme tune and the immortal phrases "Your mission – should you choose to accept it....." and "this tape will self-destruct in 5 seconds....." It's probably not a cassette tape these days. If you've never even heard of it, the premise is that the heroes are given a mission which seems impossible, but..... they complete in the final seconds of the show.

So.... What has all this got to with this morning's readings? One minute we're hearing about Jesus reading from the Hebrew scriptures, and the next we have Mission Impossible.

What we heard in our gospel reading was Jesus was announcing his manifesto or Mission Statement – nothing less than establishing the long-awaited Kingdom of God.

The words he read had been written hundreds of years before, and refer to a time when God's people would be freed from oppression and God would, once again, be their King. And Jesus was saying that the time is **now**, and the person is **me**! This is *my* mission. Quite a claim.

The people who Jesus spoke to in the synagogue that day knew all about oppression. They lived under Roman occupation and there was no way in which they were allowed to look on God as their King or Lord. Caesar was Lord. He had the status of a god throughout the Roman empire, and in practice they had to toe the Roman line or pay the consequences. They longed to be free.

And they thought they knew what was needed. A military-style leader who would drive out the Romans, and restore the nation to its former glory. To a place of political and military power and respect.

Yet as the story of Jesus' ministry unfolds we find that Jesus' Kingship is very different. It is founded on love, justice, and mercy; and the peace that it offers is far deeper than just the absence of conflict. It's restoration of our relationship with God, and the way into life that is without limits.

It sounds like Mission Impossible, but through his self-giving love – his life, death and resurrection - Jesus made it Mission Possible. It is open to all who turn to him.

But there's another sense in which it is Mission Possible. It's easy to look around at the sadness and distress in the world, and think that making any sort of difference is Mission Impossible.

Our New Testament reading this morning is just the final part of a much longer passage about how we all have a part to play in the mission of the church and hence of the Kingdom of God, using the gifts which God has given us. Some of these gifts and tasks are upfront and obvious; some are hidden but equally important.

Some people, like those who work with Adavu and ACEF will be involved in large enterprises, which make a huge difference to many people. Some of us will be involved in much more modest expressions of love and compassion – helping and supporting not just those know and love, but people we maybe hardly know at all.

Because – let's face it, "people we hardly know at all" can be quite a challenge. They may be very different from us, make us feel quite uncomfortable. Out of our depth.

And maybe what we think we *can't* do, gets in the way of what we *can* do.

Maybe sometimes we are so scared by the big and obvious challenges – that we miss the less noticeable ones, which are equally important. And there are many – so here's just one as an example. So - not just 'welcoming' a newcomer to church, to the Café, to our street, but really getting to know them, inviting them to become part of our friendship group, and flexing that group to accommodate them, to help them to truly contribute and belong. A previous Vicar of mine used to say, "every time someone new joins a church, that church changes." I'm sure it applies equally well to other settings! And I wonder if it would have been more accurate to say "the church *should* change", as I'm not sure it always does. I know to my shame that there have been times where I've only really wanted people to join on *my* terms, rather than making it possible for them to join on *theirs*. I wonder if that is a challenge that secretly most of us face?

So – it is Mission Impossible? To overcome the anxiety and fear of moving beyond what we are familiar with? What we feel comfortable with?

Well, no. As Christians we don't do this on our own. We do it with each other – the church, the body of Christ. And most importantly of all, not in our own strength, but with the help and support of God, through the Holy Spirit. The more we lean on him. The more we trust him. The more we take those tiny uncomfortable steps which lead to the growth of God's kingdom, the more we will find that "he is faithful, and he will [enable us to] do it." But until we take the step, jump into the water – or whatever metaphor you like to use – we will not discover just how much he will support us.

The Spirit of Jesus, who turns Mission Impossible into Mission Possible.