‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me’

Preaching from Luke in Year C

David Neville

In the church’s tradition, the author of the Gospel according to Luke is identified as the ‘dear Dr Luke’ of Colossians 4:14. That identification has come into question in more recent times, but the epithet, ‘dear Dr Luke’, is not far from the mark. This is not because he shows more interest in the healing arts than the other gospel writers, although he does feature Jesus’ healings rather more than his canonical counterparts. Even if we cannot be sure whether Luke was a health practitioner, however, surely he is deserving of an honorary Doctor of Letters for his literary and theological artistry. With this in mind, perhaps one criterion for discerning whether one has preached well from Luke’s Gospel is the extent to which parishioners come to the end of this liturgical year with a renewed sense of the beauty of this Gospel.

Luke as a ‘Public Theologian’

Among the gospel writers, Luke stands out for his concern to situate the events he narrates within the context of world events. Seen from a broader historical perspective, Luke’s story focuses on minor, indeed, inconsequential...
characters and events. Yet he was determined to locate those characters and events in relation to the major socio-political realities of his day and to demonstrate their relevance for a world inclined to see both Jesus and the movement he inspired as but one more religio-cultural oddity within the Roman empire.

For example, Luke's story begins with the words, 'In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest, Zechariah by name ...' His Gospel opens with a priest and his childless wife, but the unexpected familial news that turns their aged lives upside down is contextualised within a particular socio-political setting - while a puppet-king of Rome ruled with an iron fist and built his way into posterity. Luke's version of the Christmas story begins as follows: 'In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should register' (Luke 2:1-2). The birth of Jesus is situated within the political reality of empire, as is Luke's depiction of the public careers of both John and Jesus (Luke 3:1-2). This concern with the broader context of world events extends into Acts.

Luke's vision reaches beyond his own city or province; he was what we might now describe as a 'global citizen', attentive to the socio-political horizon of events and interested in the dynamic interaction between the early Christian movement and other socio-cultural movements within the wider Roman empire. But what difference does this make to preaching from Luke's Gospel? When preaching from Luke, one cannot ignore the wider world in which the church is now located. To be true to Luke's vision of the good news centred on Jesus as saviour of the world, it will not do simply to focus on individual lives, private faith and personal morality. While Christian faith does not overlook the individual, the private and the personal, it is short-sighted and stunted if it does not address the social, the institutional and the structural. There is a scholarly view that one of Luke's concerns was to show that the Christian gospel is socially, politically and culturally innocuous. The early chapters of Luke's Gospel militate against that view. Everything about the promise of the births of John and Jesus, everything about their respective births and everything about their public missions indicate that Luke understood these events as having profoundly disruptive ramifications for all aspects of imperial life.

The Spirit of the Lord and Prophecy

Luke has had a remarkable influence on the church's corporate prayer life. It is not only that Luke emphasises Jesus as a man of prayer or that he includes three parables on prayer found nowhere else (Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-8, 9-14). Beyond all that, think of how impoverished the church's liturgy would be without the three canticles drawn from Luke's opening chapters - the Magnificat of young Mary, the Benedictus of old Zechariah and the Nunc dimittis of ancient Simeon.

These utterances of praise are liturgically striking, but there is more to these canticles than first meets the eye. First, each tethers the story of Jesus to the story of Israel. By both literary style and allusion, Luke grounds his opening stories about improbable conceptions and promising beginnings in scripture. The God at work in Israel's history is again on the move, reconnecting with the people of God for the purpose of effecting salvation, which for Luke includes social reversal, forgiveness and revelation to all.

Leading up to John and Jesus, there were some within Second-Temple Judaism who considered that the period of prophecy had ended, that the spirit of prophecy had been quenched (see 1 Maccabees 9:27). Whether Luke held to this view is uncertain, but what comes through strongly in Luke's 'infancy narratives' is how indiscriminately the spirit of prophecy is showered about. Almost everyone mentioned receives a healthy dollop of the Spirit, women no less than men.

Promises Filled Full to Overflowing

For Luke, all one could have hoped for, whether one was Jewish or non-Jewish, was realised in the life-story of Jesus. From a Jewish perspective, what that meant was that all the promises of God found in the scriptures were fulfilled in Jesus. But for Luke, the 'filling full' of human hopes and dreams in Jesus was of such magnitude that not only Jewish but also non-Jewish aspirations were realised. This is why his work is sketched on such a wide canvas. The God of all reaches out to all in all places and in all circumstances.

We gain a sense of the importance of Luke's fulfilment theme from his preface to the Gospel, whose opening clause refers to 'events that have been fulfilled among us' (Luke 1:1). Others have tried their hand at putting together an account of such things, and now Luke aims to give his own reliable and orderly account. Note well, however, that Luke is not simply concerned with
remarkable events; he is concerned with events that, in his judgement, fill
to overflowing human expectations and aspirations.

To comprehend what Luke understood by 'fulfilment,' it is helpful
to look at a specific instance of Jesus fulfilling scripture. Luke 4:14–30 is
a crucial passage that encapsulates Jesus’ public ministry in a nutshell. It
sounds a number of notes that will turn out to be decisive for the melody of
the whole. The story comes immediately after the series of temptings
experienced by Jesus in the wilderness. Then, says Luke, Jesus returned to
Galilee in the power of the Spirit, leading to news about him spreading like
wildfire into the surrounding area (4:14). More specifically, Jesus taught in
‘their synagogues,’ with the result that he was honoured by all (4:19). The
appeal of Jesus is something Luke emphasises, and here he begins his account
of Jesus’ public ministry by foregrounding Jesus’ Spirit-empowerment, his
popular appeal and his teaching activity in local Jewish assemblies. Each
of these motifs is elaborated upon and nuanced in the Nazareth episode
that follows.

Nazareth, Luke reminds us, was where Jesus had been brought up in
good Jewish style, as evidenced by the detail that he customarily attends
the synagogue on the Sabbath. On this occasion, Jesus both reads from
scripture and comments upon it. He is handed the book of Isaiah, then
locates these words:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, in that he has anointed
me to announce good news to the poor; he has sent me to
proclaim release to captives, sight again to the blind, to
send away the oppressed in release, to proclaim the year
of the Lord’s favour ... (4:18–19).

These are solemn words, freighted with prophetic promise. In and of them-
selves, they command attention, but Luke carefully notes how Jesus rolls up
the scroll and returns it to the attendant before sitting to interpret what he
has read. ‘And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon him,’ Luke
observes.

Luke gives only the gist of Jesus’ sermon, signalled by noting that Jesus
began to say to the gathered assembly, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled
in your hearing.’ The response is positive. People are astonished but respond
favourably to his grace-filled words. Things eventually turn sour, provoked

by further words from Jesus, but what might Luke have meant by Jesus’
sermon sentence, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing?’

One point that should come out in anyone’s preaching from Luke is
how scripture-oriented is his Gospel. For Luke, the story of Jesus is in some
sense scripted by scripture. But there is an interesting dynamic between
scripture and its fulfilment in this passage (and in others). It is not simply
that an antique scripture whose meaning is clear and straightforward ‘comes
true’ in and through an event recounted by Luke. Rather, a scripture whose
meaning may have been thought to be clear and straightforward is itself cast
in a new light by virtue of its association with Jesus. The scriptural resource
for giving meaning to Jesus’ own story is itself tweaked so that both gospel
story and scriptural resource are reconfigured.

If we pay careful attention to the words of Isaiah that Jesus is said to
have read, we notice that these words are all taken from the third major
section of the book of the prophet Isaiah, but not all from the same passage.
Jesus begins with Isaiah 61:1, backtracks to Isaiah 58:6, then returns to
Isaiah 61:2. Or, perhaps better, Jesus conflates Isaiah 61:1 with 58:6 before
continuing with 61:2. In reality, it is a ‘continuation’ soon aborted, for the
whole of Isaiah 61:2 reads: ‘to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, and
the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.’

When a New Testament writer cites scripture, that is an invitation to the
reader, especially the reader with a responsibility to preach, to enter into
that ‘conversation’ between texts. Why would Luke describe Jesus reading
from Isaiah 61:1–2 but breaking off precisely where Isaiah complements good
news of comfort for Israel with bad news of divine vengeance for Israel’s
oppressors? For some, this smidgeon of text recalls the whole, and Luke
intended his readers to fill in the blanks. Jesus is the anticipated prophet
whose mission is to enact both divine deliverance and divine vengeance.

There are problems with this view, however. For a start, Luke does not
present Jesus’ mission as vengeful or vindictive. Moreover, when John puts
the question to Jesus whether he is the anticipated one or whether another
should be awaited (Luke 7:18–20), how does Jesus reply? The answer is in
Luke 7:22, a pastiche of phrases drawn from – the prophet Isaiah. Drawing
upon a series of contexts in Isaiah, Jesus points John to these features of his
mission: ‘the blind recover sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf
hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news announced their way.’
Once again, if one takes the trouble to track down these phrases in their
original Isaiah contexts, one finds that they invariably sit side by side with prophetic anticipations of a much darker, retributive kind.

Why were Luke's explicit scripture citations so selective? I have come to the conclusion that Luke knew nothing about Jesus of Nazareth that resonated with retributive judgement. To be clear, I do not think that the life-story of Jesus makes divine judgement redundant. That would be to diminish God, to trivialise human conduct and to empty the concept of justice of any meaningful moral content. After all, without divine judgement, might is right. What I think Luke understood by Jesus' appeals to Isaiah to give meaning to his own mission and message is that Jesus' restorative impact served as the form of divine judgement - demonstrating how far short of God's will for creation things actually are - no less than the content of prophetic hope fulfilled.

In other words, the manner in which Jesus fulfils divinely inspired promises reinterprets as well as realises those ancient promises. For Luke, God's ways cannot be contained - not even in scripture. When scriptural promises are fulfilled in Jesus, such promises are filled fuller than could have been imagined. In the economy of God, promise does not simply lead to fulfilment; rather, fulfilment leads to the promise itself being understood in a fresh light. Otherwise, Jesus is but one more in a long line of noteworthy prophetic figures, not really one who brings restoration and transformation.

Journeying toward God

These days everyone is on a 'journey', even when stuck in a rut. The so-called 'journey of faith' is perhaps by now a tired image. But whether or not we warm to the image of the life of faith as a journey, it certainly fits Luke's understanding of Christian discipleship. One of Luke's evident innovations is to make Jesus' journey to Jerusalem a major narrative section and to make this journey section the context of much of Jesus' teaching on discipleship, prayer, money and the like. The journey toward Jerusalem is for Jesus the journey toward his 'exodus' (Luke 9:31), whereas for his disciples and other followers the journey to Jerusalem with Jesus is their noviciate into a new way of life. They learn this new way on the way, and in Luke's account the pathway they must tread is significantly longer and more burdened with things that must be learned and absorbed than in any other gospel account.

Little wonder, then, that in Acts the early Christian movement is itself known as 'the Way' (9:24; 19:9; 22:42; 24:3). And it happened that as the day of his "taking up" was drawing near, he fixed his face to go to Jerusalem, writes Luke (9:51). The term Luke uses for 'drawing near' is a variation on the verb, 'to fulfill'. In other words, his 'taking up', probably his ascension, is no less part of what is destined to occur than his suffering, rejection, death and resurrection, about which he informs his disciples in Luke 9:22. This 'taking up' or ascension is likely Jesus' 'exodus', about which Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus at his transformation on the mountain, and which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem. In other words, when Jesus sets out for Jerusalem, it is a deliberate determination to act in accordance with what he understands to be a divine imperative, a journey toward being restored to God that includes walking, mixing with people, teaching, challenging preconceptions, provocation, betrayal, suffering, death, resurrection and, finally, ascension. All of this and more fulfils the divine purpose, not only his death. Death on a cross is a 'pit-stop' on the journey toward God, not the sole objective of Jesus' mission and not the sole reason for his journey to Jerusalem. This is not to diminish the significance of Jesus' death in Luke's Gospel, only to place it in its proper context - the journey toward God.

Although the ascension is part of the church's liturgical calendar because of Luke's narration of it, we learn more of its significance from the beginning of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem than from its perfunctory narration in Luke 24:51, if indeed it was originally referred to there. The ascension is the culmination of Jesus' journey toward God, not - as in the Fourth Gospel - his return to God, but a movement to God nonetheless. And for Luke, Jesus' journey to God is what makes possible our turning toward and movement to God. We journey toward God in the wake of Jesus, who is, as the writer of Hebrews puts it, 'the pioneer of our faith' (12:2). But journeying toward God in the wake of Jesus also means to be drawn into the way of Jesus.

Much could be said about Jesus' (and his disciples') journey to Jerusalem, which is the context for so much of Luke's distinctive contribution to the Jesus-story. Here I focus on two decisive but not so obvious points. First, a key aspect of Luke's account of Jesus' journey to God is the way in which Luke's peace theme brackets the journey as a whole. Luke is the recognised evangelist of peace. As a result, it is perhaps not surprising that the peace theme is prominent at both beginning and end of this distinctively Lukan
section, enclosing and thereby holding together all the teaching material in these ten chapters – whether on discipleship, the mercy of God, money or prayer. At the very beginning of this section, Jesus has no sooner begun his journey than he has to rebuke James and John for wanting to call down fire from heaven upon a Samaritan town. Vindictive vengeance is not Jesus’ way. ‘Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace be to this house”, Jesus instructs his evangelists a few lines later (10:5). Then, at journey’s end, upon catching sight of the city of Jerusalem, he weeps over its incapacity to recognise in his presence and mission ‘those things that lead to peace’ (19:42). By introducing the peace motif prominently at the beginning and ending of his Journey Narrative (9:51–19:44),’ writes Willard Swartley, ‘Luke wants his readers to see that Jesus’ entire mission was one of bringing peace. The mission of Jesus is God’s way of waging peace in an unreceptive, violent and often cruel world. Luke’s Gospel will not have been proclaimed faithfully if by year’s end people have not been challenged anew by the gospel truth that attending to those things that make for peace, waging peace ourselves, is at the centre of what it means to follow Jesus and his way to God.

The passage that concludes Luke’s journey section not only reiterates Luke’s peace theme but also reiterates a theme sounded at the beginning of the Gospel – divine visitation. If the Fourth Gospel is the gospel of incarnation and Matthew’s Gospel is the gospel of Emmanuel, God’s real presence with us, albeit in surprising ways, then Luke’s variation on this theme is the visitation of God in the prophetic mission of Jesus. In the Benedictus that concludes Luke’s opening chapter, the Spirit-influenced prophecy of the priest Zechariah begins and ends with the theme of divine visitation for human salvation (1:68, 78). Then, in Luke 7:16, those who witness the raising of the young man of Nain praise God by exclaiming, ‘A great prophet has been raised up among us,’ and – as an extension of this – ‘God has visited his people.’ In other words, the presence in their midst of a great prophet signals divine visitation. But perhaps the crowds are mistaken. Not according to Jesus, who at the culmination of his journey toward Jerusalem and thence to God, forecasts Jerusalem’s inevitable demise because of the city’s failure to recognise the appointed time of visitation. In the prophetic persona of Jesus, people may encounter – but may also miss – the divine presence offering healing salvation.

The Suffering and Death of the ‘Righteous One’

Like Matthew, Luke emphasises Jesus’ innocence, but for somewhat different reasons. Writing for a more broadly cultured audience and likely influenced by Graeco-Roman ideas, Luke presents Jesus as the innocent sufferer who is conscious that he must suffer and die in accordance with the scriptural pattern of the righteous but rejected prophet. So strong is Luke’s concern to present Jesus’ innocent suffering as conforming to scriptural precedent that it may well explain the curious – and uniquely Lukian – episode in which Jesus instructs his disciples, contrary to earlier instruction, to make sure they have swords at hand (Luke 22:35–38). This, he tells them, is on account of the necessity to fulfil the prophetic scripture that says, ‘And he was reckoned with the law-breakers’ (Isaiah 53:12). That scriptural fulfilment is the primary point of this text, rather than a late change of mind on Jesus’ part about the validity of violent self-defence, is confirmed by Jesus’ reprimand when he is actually defended with a sword (22:49–51). As if to underscore the point, Luke – and Luke alone – recounts that Jesus healed the man separated from his ear.

The serenity and fidelity Jesus displays during his unjust treatment is reminiscent of the image of stoic acceptance of death, perhaps best illustrated in Plato’s Phaedo, an account of the death of his mentor, Socrates, who accepts his unjust death calmly after refusing to escape. Jesus’ innocence is emphasised by Pilate’s threefold declaration that he has done nothing to deserve death (23:4, 13–15, 22), a judgment echoed by the puppet tyrant, Herod (23:15), by one of two bandits crucified alongside Jesus (23:40–41), and finally by the Roman centurion, who at the moment of Jesus’ death exults, ‘No doubt this man was righteous’ (23:47). This declaration by the centurion is especially interesting because here Luke almost certainly alters words with which he was familiar. In both Matthew and Mark’s accounts of Jesus’ death, the centurion exclaims, ‘Truly, this man was God’s son.’ For Luke, then, Jesus is certainly the innocent victim of injustice. More than that, however, ‘he is the truly righteous person portrayed in the psalms of the righteous sufferer?’ For this reason, he is someone to be honoured and emulated.

Jesus’ serenity in the face of ignoble injustice is highlighted by Jesus’ utterances under the duress of crucifixion, all unique to Luke. In Luke 23:34, Jesus prays for the forgiveness of his enemies, on account of their ignorance.
Not long later, in response to the request of the co-crucified bandit who defends his innocence, he offers reassurance: ‘Truly I tell you, today you shall be with me in paradise’ (23:43). And finally, Jesus’ cry from the cross immediately before his death recalls Psalm 31:5, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit’ (23:46). Once again, it is almost certain that Luke alters wording familiar to him, for both Matthew and Mark record Jesus’ final cry as recalling Psalm 32:23, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ Luke seems to recognise that their use of Psalm 22:1 is not so much historical reminiscence as interpretive commentary, but he considers those particular words as either too hopeless or too ambiguous. For him, the Jesus who fixed his face for Jerusalem to fulfil his ‘exodus’ must surely have maintained his steadfast trust in the God of Israel. Moreover, only such an attitude of trust was worthy of emulation, as in the case of Stephen in Acts 7.

Among other features of Luke’s passion story worthy of more detailed comment is Luke’s inclusion of the disciples’ dispute about which of them was the greatest (precisely within the context of the Passover meal (22:24–30). Each of the first three gospel writers recognised the importance of the disciples’ repeated jostling for priority, but both Matthew and Mark deal with this well before Jesus arrives in Jerusalem. Under the gospel writers’ gaze, none of the disciples emerges from their respective accounts in an especially heroic light, but for Luke to place perhaps the most significant instance of this dispute immediately following Jesus’ final meal with his disciples is suggestive.

Suggestive of what, however? Something in Luke’s version of this shameful episode suggests that ‘presiding at table’ was a contentious question in some Christian communities known to Luke. Table fellowship, with all that that implied, features prominently in Luke’s narrative, and there are hints elsewhere that table matters, such as who reclined where and next to whom, were of some consequence. Perhaps as part of this cultural jostling for prominence, division and dissent were being caused by jostling for authority when Christians gathered around the Lord’s table. This was probably still a communal meal when Luke wrote and therefore likely held in the home of someone with wealth and social status.

In such a situation, who takes charge? Culturally speaking, the question was nonsensical. But as Luke suggests in his version of Jesus’ Passover meal, Jesus the master took on the role of one who serves. Within the Christian community, Luke seems to say, both table matters and table manners should be different from societal norms. This needs unpacking, but perhaps the most important thing to say is that Jesus’ commendation of service was addressed precisely to those jostling for prestige and authority, not to those whose social status would never have permitted them to imagine any other role than the functions of a slave.

En route to Emmaus

Luke’s story of the post-resurrection encounter en route to Emmaus might well be the exquisite pinnacle of his literary and theological artistry. The sojourn to Emmaus is a sequel to the previous story in which the women witnesses to the open tomb actually do as they are instructed and report everything to the Eleven and to all the rest. Luke 24:10–11 is revealing. There we are told the names of the women who went to the tomb: Mary of Magdala, Joanna and Mary the mother of James. According to Luke, ‘they told the apostles everything, and these words of theirs seemed nonsensical to them [the apostles], and they disbeliefed them’. Remember, Luke clearly indicates that these women have journeyed alongside the men ever since the days in Galilee. But the men are as blinkered about the women as the two disciples en route to Emmaus are blinkered about the identity of their uninvited and seemingly uninformed fellow-traveller.

As Luke 24:23–24 makes clear, the two proceeding toward Emmaus have heard the women’s news but, like the others, discounted it. One of the two is named Cleopas, so is clearly not one of the inner circle of the Twelve, now trimmed down to eleven. Since Luke is rather fond of gender balance elsewhere, it is not far-fetched to think of these two as husband and wife. But in any case, it is to these two ‘small fry’ in the Jesus movement that Jesus appears, albeit incognito, not to the ‘big fish’ in the movement. But have these two learned any more than their more prominent colleagues? Perhaps they have. After all, at what they take to be their journey’s end, they do impose on the wayfaring stranger to accept their hospitality, an act reminiscent of him whose absence they are mourning. As Patrick Grant observes,

The crucial moment in the [Emmaus] story … can easily be passed over. It occurs when Jesus is about to walk on, and they invite him in. His journey, wherever he was headed, is unexpectedly interrupted and their own journey takes an unexpected twist, based on a moment’s generosity and
fellow feeling. That is the true ground of their understanding the resurrection as an extension of Jesus’ spirit into our everyday behaviour and meeting with others. The risen Jesus is concrete, but we cannot recognise him until we act in the spirit of his teachings.

‘Act in the spirit of his teachings …’ ‘Walk in the wake of Jesus …’ As obtuse as these disciples are presented, Luke also signals that something of Jesus stuck. Something beyond conscious thought took hold and remained ingrained, thereby opening up the possibility of transforming encounter. Yet it was what he had taught, it was how he had conducted himself and it was perhaps his elusive presence that evoked recollection deeper than memory.

It means much to those for whom the Eucharist is central that, in this story, the Risen One is recognised at table as bread is broken and shared. Hospitality is offered, indeed, pressed upon the Stranger, who seems intent on moving on. Yet the hospitality of the hosts is inverted by the hospitality of the guest, who surprisingly offers the blessing and thereby facilitates the surprising recognition. But recognition triggers absence, at which point we learn that sacrament alone is fleeting. What do Cleopas and his companion say to each other on the Stranger’s disappearance? Not, ‘How was it that seeing him bless and break bread enabled us to recognise him as the Risen One?’, but rather, ‘Were not our hearts burning while he was talking with us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ (Luke 24:32).

Would these two have recognised the Risen One at the table had they not experienced the earlier scriptural exposition? In this story, Word and Sacrament feed off each other. When the two report to their confreres back in Jerusalem, ‘they interpret to them [both] the events along the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread’ (Luke 24:35). Perhaps the key thing to note in the whole of Luke 24 is that the Risen One is not at anyone’s disposal — in any sense of the word. Encountering him is not the result of human initiative, and even when he is encountered, recognising him is not a straightforward matter of intelligence or natural insight — and is apparently fleeting.

However literally Luke intended his Emmaus Road story, it helpfully provides insight into a necessary holding together of community interpretation with community togetherness. The words of Cleopas and his companion, ‘But we had hoped that he is the one about to liberate Israel’ (Luke 24:21a), reveal their starting point, a starting point reiterated, incidentally, in Acts 1:6.

The Risen One’s rhetorical question, ‘Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and (only) then enter his glory?’ (Luke 24:26), requires as much — if not more — reinterpretation of scripture in light of Jesus’ life as identifying and expositing ancient scriptures that point toward his life and mission. When Richard Hays comments, in connection with Luke 24:27 and 44, that ‘Luke explicitly attributes the origin of christological interpretation of the Old Testament to Jesus himself,’ it is vital to understand ‘christological interpretation’ as something like reading backwards, reinterpreting long-familiar texts in light of the Jesus-story. But without sharing with each other, whether at table or in other ways, this process of discovery, reinterpretation and discernment would have been idiosyncratic, the product of individualisation, perhaps even privatised, spirituality or imagination. Within the community of interpretation we know as the church, reading scripture as disciples of the church’s Saviour and Lord requires forms of interpretation better known as gathering together and sharing together. Insular biblical interpretation is oxymoronic because only in the company of the resurrection community are to be found resources necessary for recognising Jesus in Israel’s scriptures.

Concluding Reflection

For Luke, the ‘today’ of Jesus fulfilled all yesterdays by filling full to overflowing the hopes and aspirations of all people everywhere, both people of God and people far from God. Reflecting on this leads to the recognition that the news about Jesus proclaimed by Luke is not only good but also attractive and appealing. People should recognise in the Gospel of Luke a message that resonates no less than discomfits, a word that comforts no less than challenges. If they do not, we who preach from Luke’s Gospel have failed both the text from which we preach and those to whom we have preached. When we preach from a gospel, we are as close as ever we can be to proclaiming a word from God grounded in the story of Jesus. And when we preach from Luke’s Gospel, we are as close as ever we can be to proclaiming a word of salvation grounded in God’s visitation in Jesus to seek out the lost, to welcome the homeless, to release the oppressed, to heal the afflicted, to lift up the poverty-stricken, indeed, to announce the Jubilee year of God’s gracious favour.
The library of the future

Musings on the politics of meaning

Scott Cowdell

In addressing the future of libraries in general and theological libraries in particular, let me be clear about where my own heart lies.¹ I have always cherished theological libraries as places of peace and quiet communion. I think of the Roscoe Library at St Francis’ Theological College in Brisbane where I was trained for the ministry as a cherished haven of exploration and reflection, especially on long Saturday afternoons working alone there, or late at night by lamplight as the college slept but the books were wide awake. Of course, the door was never locked. I remember fondly a non-borrowing library at the old Banyo Seminary, where every student had their own desk; also the heavy, nurturing quiet of a seldom-visited library tucked away at the Mercy Sisters’ Generalate in Brisbane, where our annual college retreat took place. It was there in blissful and total solitude that I first discovered the boundary between reading and praying giving way. I have valued my time in really energetic theological libraries, too – the Joint Theological

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