

- In our gospel reading today we are right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry:
 - He has been baptised in the river Jordan by John the baptizer and the Spirit has descended upon him,
 - empowering him for the ministry that lies ahead of him.
 - That same Spirit has then driven him into the wilderness where he encounters Satan and all the temptations that come with the power that is his.
 - And then, emerging from the wilderness and immediately after John the Baptist was arrested, he begins his ministry proper, declaring:
 - "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news".
- And in this declaration what Jesus is announcing is a decisive break between what has gone before and what is now coming.
- He is declaring the end of the world as we know it and announcing that a new reality is at hand -
 - the kingdom of God.
- And he is calling people to join him in turning from, and leaving behind, that old world and turning toward this new world that is both already here, visible and tangible in the person and ministry of Jesus, and yet still coming in all its fullness.
 - And it is this act of turning - turning from this world to that world - that is at the heart of what repentance means.
 - Repentance means turning from one way of being to another
- So, how are we to distinguish between this old world from which we are to turn and this new world that we see coming in Jesus and that we are called to embrace?
- Well, in our gospel reading today, Jesus is teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum on the sabbath.
- And those who are there are astounded at his teaching because he teaches them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.
- The word for authority also means "power" and it seems clear that Jesus' teaching has a quality to it that evokes something different in his hearers,
 - something different from what or how they may have been hearing previously.

- Jesus' power is the power of life and freedom whereas the authority and power of the scribes is a diminished power,
 - a power that has been compromised by their identity as agents of/entanglement in an oppressive and exploitative system,
 - a power that has been compromised by the vested interests and hypocrisy of the religious hierarchy.
- The scribes do not speak a word of life.
- Instead, as Jesus says, they place burdens on the people that they do not themselves share.
- In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is recorded as saying,
 - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practised without neglecting the others".
- The teaching of the scribes seems to have been experienced as the heaping up of burdens rather than a release from the oppressive weight of such burdens.
- And all of this is happening within the wider context of Roman rule.
- The people of Israel are a colonised people.
- Their land has been physically occupied by an invading power and they are at the mercy of tyrannical puppet rulers placed over them by the Romans.
- More than that, though, it is their minds that have been colonised as well.
- In their experience of military defeat;
 - in their experience of foreign domination;
 - in all the ways in which they and their leaders have been oppressed, suppressed, co-opted and ensnared by a domination system,
 - their minds have been colonised and they have become subject to the imperatives of self-interest, self-preservation, anxiety and fear.
 - The people of Israel are a people confined by their circumstances.
- And what those people in Capernaum hear from Jesus, in their synagogue on the Sabbath, is a word of liberation.
- What they hear from Jesus is the promise of hope and freedom.
 - Freedom from the effects of that domination system,
 - freedom from the voices of fear and anxiety that hold them captive,

- freedom from the resentment and despair that are the bitter fruit of their confinement,
 - and hope, sweet, sweet hope, that there is yet a better way.
- I want to suggest that we too are in desperate need of that promise of hope and freedom.
- Perhaps it might seem over the top, a little melodramatic, to draw any kind of comparison between our reality, right here and now, and that of the people of Israel in Jesus' time.
 - We do not labour under foreign domination.
 - We are not subject to the oppressive realities of fear and anxiety and resentment and despair that go with that.
 - We are not a colonised people.
- Except we are.
- We too are a people confined by our circumstances.
- We too are a people caught in the strangle-hold of our history:
 - our own personal histories
 - and the history we share as a nation.
- I sometimes listen to audio books when I am out running.
- And I've been listening to Michael King's *A History of New Zealand*.
- And it seems very clear to me that the effects of the injustices of our history, and the attitudes that gave rise to those injustices are still with us today and that we too are subject to a domination system that continues to shape our lives.
- And I'm not just talking about the history of injustice towards Maori in this country which is still being played out in very real ways as is clear from our prison statistics, our mental health statistics, our educational achievement statistics, our socio-economic demographics and our casual racism and unexamined biases.
- I'm also talking about the gap that has grown between rich and poor, the rise in homelessness, the ridiculous unaffordability of housing, and our appalling record of child poverty and family violence.
- We are a colonised people,
 - caught in the grip of a domination system.
- And we need to hear the same promise of hope and freedom that Jesus announced to those people on that Sabbath day in that synagogue in Capernaum.

- We need healing.
- We need to be delivered from our demons.
- And we need those words of hope and freedom that Jesus speaks.
- We need to repent and to keep repenting,
 - to turn and to keep turning from that old world to the new world that is both already here, visible and tangible in the person and ministry of Jesus, and yet still coming in all its fullness.
- Jesus calls us to follow him so let us turn to him once more.
- Let us turn once more towards the promise of hope and freedom.