

Drama: Jesus' manifesto

A dramatized discussion between an interviewer and Jesus about his reading of the scroll in the synagogue based on Luke 4.16-21.

This sketch is set in a television studio as an interview between an Andrew Marr type figure and Jesus, as a seemingly naïve politician. If the congregation can see them, it would be good to have the characters seated, facing each other, but turned towards the congregation at the same time. The interviewer needs to have a clipboard, suggesting that he has a list of questions.

Interviewer Welcome back after the break. Today we are delighted to have Jesus of Nazareth with us here in the studio. Now you've probably not heard of him yet ... but he's going to be the one to watch in the next couple of years. He hails from Galilee, works as a carpenter in the family business and following, what he describes as a life-changing experience when he got himself baptised by his cousin (who we know as John the Baptist), he has gone around the region of Nazareth preaching his message. By all accounts, he is starting to attract quite a following. So it's a great pleasure to welcome you this morning.

Jesus Thank you.

Interviewer I'd like to begin with what has been described as your manifesto: the statement you made in the synagogue in Nazareth.

Jesus Sure.

Interviewer For the benefit of our viewers who weren't there to hear you in person, you said – in essence – that you wanted to bring good news to the poor.

Jesus Yes, that's right.

Interviewer Doesn't every politician want to do that?

Jesus Do they indeed?!

Interviewer OK, I'll re-phrase that. Doesn't every politician say that they are for the poor and disadvantaged?

Jesus I'm sure they do say that, but that's not the same as bringing about actual good news to the poor and disadvantaged, is it?

Interviewer Well, let's look at what you mean when you say you want to bring good news to the poor. Number one: you are going to release the captives. Number two: you are going to give sight to the blind. And number three: you are going to set the oppressed free.

Jesus And four: proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Interviewer Let's leave that one to the side for the moment. Number two – bringing sight to the blind – is laudable but how on earth are you going to achieve this, when medical science as it now stands can't do this?

Jesus Simple! I see it as my mission to open people's eyes to the truth of what is going on around them. I'll give you an example, we live by greed: it's all about what we can get not what we can give, even if it means that others suffer. We want to get away with what we can, rather

than be honest with ourselves and those around us. Where is our integrity? We too easily turn a blind eye to protect our own interests, rather than get involved. Not least the most religious amongst us, who would rather remain ritually pure than stoop to help someone in need. I want to change all that.

Interviewer Hmmm! Point number three: letting the oppressed go free. Again laudable, but how are you going to do that? Bear in mind that we are a people living under occupation.

Jesus Self-rule may not come in our life-time, but we do not have to give in to our oppression. We are a people of faith – a faith stretching back centuries and a people who have always known suffering. We should live not as people under occupation, but as people living in the kingdom of God.

Interviewer And what is this kingdom of God?

Jesus It is a place and a time where the poor receive good news.

Interviewer Let me just try and get a handle on what you are saying: what is that good news?

Jesus Let me ask you a question. What is good news to the homeless? What is good news to the sick and infirm? What is good news to the hungry? What is good news to the refugee and the asylum seeker? What is good news to the poor? What do you think?

Interviewer I think that's several questions ... but it's my job to ask the questions, not answer them. And so I bring you back to number one: are you really going to let all the prisoners go free? Are you advocating mass lawlessness? Isn't this taking forgiveness too far?

Jesus My friend, we are all prisoners of our fears. And the biggest fear is believing that we can do nothing, that change cannot come, that we are completely powerless. God made us, God created us with a voice to speak out, God empowers us to act, God calls us to make a difference to this world, not to sit back and let it happen all around us.

Interviewer Can I just point out that what you said in that synagogue in Nazareth, and has come to be known as your manifesto, was actually said many centuries ago by the prophet Isaiah. Now that's many centuries which have gone by without it being implemented. Aren't you just building up people's hopes by regurgitating Isaiah's words, knowing that they are never going to come to pass? What makes you think that you are the one who can do it?

Jesus Because the spirit of the Lord is upon me. I am the one God has chosen to bring that good news to the poor.

Interviewer Is that what you mean by this being the year of the Lord's favour?

Jesus Yes.

Interviewer I wish you well ... but sadly we are out of time.

Jesus No ... there is still time.