

Contextual Bible Study

Where Theology and Policy Meet

Texts: Luke 4:16–21 & Acts 4:32–35

Theme: Good News that becomes shared life

1. Welcome and Framing

As we begin this webinar during the season of Lent, we slow down long enough to listen again to Jesus — not only as a spiritual teacher, but as someone deeply concerned with how people actually live.

Lent reminds us that Jesus' journey toward the cross began with a public announcement about the kind of world God desires.

Today we listen to two moments in Scripture:

- when Jesus describes his mission, and
- when the early church tries to live that mission out.

2. Reading the Texts

Luke 4:16–21 – Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth

16-21 He came to Nazareth where he had been raised. As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place. When he stood up to read, he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written,

God's Spirit is on me;

he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor,

Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and

recovery of sight to the blind,

To set the burdened and battered free,

to announce, "This is God's time to shine!"

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the place was on him, intent. Then he started in, "You've just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place."

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor..."

Seeing the text together - Question 1

What do you notice about who is at the center of Jesus' mission in Luke 4?

(the poor, prisoners, the oppressed, those excluded.)

Jesus does not begin with ideas or institutions.

He begins with **people whose lives are fragile**.

Acts 4:32–35 – The life of the early believers

32-33The whole congregation of believers was united as one—one heart, one mind! They didn't even claim ownership of their own possessions. No one said, "That's mine; you can't have it." They shared everything. The apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Master Jesus, and grace was on all of them.

34-35And so it turned out that not a person among them was needy. Those who owned fields or houses sold them and brought the price of the sale to the apostles and made an offering of it. The apostles then distributed it according to each person's need.

"No one claimed private ownership of possessions... there was not a needy person among them."

Invite participants simply to notice words or phrases that stand out.

3. Seeing the Text Together

In Acts 4, what changes in the community because they take Jesus seriously?

- resources are shared
- needs are noticed
- dignity is protected
- no one is left in need

One striking sentence stands out:

"There was not a needy person among them."

4. Connecting Bible and Context

Now we gently move from **then** to **now**.

In Luke 4, Jesus announces good news for the poor. We saw in Him the embodiment of His good news.

In Acts 4, that good news becomes economic practice within a community.

So the question naturally arises:

Question 3

If Jesus announced good news for the poor today, knowing the church is called to continue His word - what might people in our South African context hope that good news looks like?

Many people today live with deep economic insecurity — unemployment, hunger, inequality, and uncertainty about tomorrow.

The early church did not separate faith from material life.

Spiritual transformation shaped how resources were organised and shared.

This does not immediately give us one policy answer — but it does raise an important theological question:

What does it mean, in our time, to take seriously a world where fewer people live in desperate need?

5. Theology Meets Public Life

Acts shows something important:

The gospel moved from **proclamation** → to **community practice**.

Faith began to influence how people structured life together.

Today, societies also wrestle with questions about how communities ensure dignity, survival, and participation for all people.

So perhaps the conversation where theology meets policy begins here:

Question 4

What responsibilities do communities — including churches and societies — carry when we believe God cares about whether people have enough to live?

Lent reminds us that following Jesus eventually challenges existing systems and assumptions about power, wealth, and belonging.

The road to the cross began with good news proclaimed to the poor.

6. Closing Reflection

Maybe these two texts leave us with a simple but profound tension:

Jesus announces good news.

The early church tries to embody it.

And we are still asking today:

How do we organise our common life so that fewer people are left without what they need to live with dignity?

That is where theology and policy begin to meet.