

Third Weekend After the Epiphany (RCL/C):
"Jesus' Inaugural Address: Who He Is and Who We Are to Be"
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21
January 24-25, 2025
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

It's not "news" to us that "good news" for some is "bad news" to others. The forecast of a big snowstorm (or almost any snowfall) makes me really happy. To others, the prospect of snow is downright depressing. Last Sunday the outcome of the Eagles/Rams play-off game was good news for Eagles fans and bad news for the Rams cheering section. Ditto with the Buffalo Bills vs. the Ravens contest. It all depends on your perspective.

'Same with what Jesus has to say in this weekend's Gospel. The story line continues next weekend, when we'll see that Jesus' preaching debut in His hometown synagogue ends with His neighbors trying to push Him off a cliff. "Could've gone better," as they say.

We follow a 3 year lectionary, a 3 year cycle of readings, and it just so happens that this Gospel about the inaugural address of Jesus' public ministry falls the weekend after the Inauguration in D.C. St. Luke is the only evangelist who places Jesus' first (and maybe only) sermon to His childhood neighbors and friends first up, after His temptation in the desert. Until now, the only words Jesus has spoken in this Gospel are to His frantic parents who have finally found their missing 12-year-old teaching in the Temple (*"Why were you searching for me? Did you not know I must be in my Father's house?"* Luke 2:49) and then quoting Scripture to the devil during the temptation in the desert.

As preacher, Jesus got to pick the Scripture He'd read, and He chose a passage from the prophet Isaiah [blend of Isaiah 61:1-2 and Isaiah 58:6]. St. Luke tells us Jesus, who was *"filled with the power of the Spirit"* (Luke 4:14), proclaimed this Scripture and named Himself as the

fulfillment of it. As you listen, remember, it's going to be good news for some and bad news for others:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the
synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been
fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-21)*

The one whom the Spirit anoints to bring good news, to proclaim release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, the end of oppression, is **Messiah**. That's what *messiah* means: the anointed one. Jesus is saying, "God's promise, made 1,000 years ago to King David and therefore to the people of Israel, is coming true in Me. **Today. Not just someday. Here and now.**"

But how could that be anything less than **great** news? Well, it all depends on your perspective. If I am rich and good news to the poor means I'm going to have to share more of my blessings or even divest some of my wealth, that's threatening and not all that appealing. If I'm the one who imprisoned people for starters, their release isn't going to please me. If I'm blind by choice and don't **want** to see what I choose **not** to see, recovery of sight is unwelcomed. And if I am the oppressor, letting the oppressed go free is going to be pretty scary. Nobody wants to face a come-uppance.

Jesus quotes Isaiah *"to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* (Luke 4:19) That's a reference to the Jubilee Year mentioned in Leviticus 25. The Lord tells the people that every 50 years the clock should be reset to give everybody a fresh beginning and a level playing field. Debts should be forgiven; property that was taken from the poor should be returned; captives should be set free. Wonderful, if you are on the receiving end of compassion, mercy and justice for the poor and

oppressed; not so attractive if you're the one in current possession of the land taken in payment of an unpaid debt, or you're the one who is owed money. As far as we know, the Jubilee Year never actually happened. It was always going to be "someday" in the safe, indeterminate future when finally God's will is perfectly done and God's kingdom perfectly comes. 'Kinda like telling the enslaved they've have pie in the sky, by and by; be patient and content with your present lot. "Someday" in the safe, indeterminate future, things will be different, better for you. Not yet.

What Jesus had to say is tame enough if it's just more religious jargon, but not tame at all if we take it seriously. And Jesus **did** take it seriously and literally. He actually healed the sick, cast out demons, delivered the poor from despair, befriended and forgave sinners, challenged those who use religion to oppress others instead of to glorify God and serve the neighbor. Later on He'll call the unfaithful religious leaders onto the carpet:

39 ... "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness... 42 "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others..." (Luke 11)

By reading this passage from Isaiah as His inaugural address, our Lord is revealing His holy identity and announcing His holy **agenda**. He is also showing us, His followers, who we are and what our agenda should be. As we look toward the rest of the story, Jesus is also foreshadowing what kind of reception His followers can expect if they act as little Christs, advocating for the poor, the vulnerable, the outsider, the stranger, the dispossessed, and the powerless. **Mercy** and **justice** are the hallmarks of His reign. As we hear in Micah 6, **we** are to do justice and to love mercy as well! Just as our Lord Jesus was not Savior only on the Sabbath, in the synagogue, we cannot be Christians only on the weekend, in the sanctuary. Religion that stays behind in the sanctuary is sterile. Faith must be active in love. Hopefully we hear that as **good** news and act on it. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

