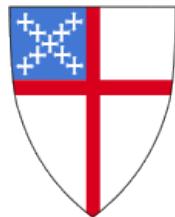


The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Year C
 RCL



Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10
 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a
 Luke 4:14-21
 Psalm 19

The Collect

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

SERMON

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my
 heart be acceptable in your sight, *
 O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer

In this passage from Luke, we find Jesus is speaking in a synagogue. In fact, this passage is considered to be one of the oldest known accounts of a synagogue service (p287).

On this particular Sabbath, we see that Jesus has volunteered to read a section from the Prophets. It is thought that this selection from Isaiah would have been his choice. (Isa 61:1ff).

I think it's important to stop here and mention what has led up to this moment in Jesus' life. In chapters just prior to this passage, Luke tells us of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, and of his temptations in the wilderness. And Luke describes how, in these experiences, Jesus has been anointed and claimed by the Holy Spirit, --- how he has been tested and empowered for his ministry that lies ahead.

In our story today Jesus has returned to Galilee. In this synagogue, he steps into public ministry. He acknowledges his sense of transformation, and that he is filled with the Holy Spirit. He reads a passage from Isaiah.

The passage would have been familiar to the Qumran Hebrew community present in the synagogue. They would have known that these words were a description of the Messiah who was to come. (Jewish community that lived in the Judean desert from around 100 BC to AD 68).

But these listeners who are very familiar with the words of Isaiah are hearing them reinterpreted before their very eyes and ears. They are **not** hearing them as a prophecy of old, but as the fulfillment of the prophecy. Jesus is telling them that the messiah has arrived. And it is He, standing before them.

Jesus tells them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Much has been written about this passage, but the one aspect that most, if not all, theological scholars agree on is that this is the blueprint for Jesus' ministry. If we stray from our understanding of mission, it is to these words that we are to return for re-tuning or re-focusing our discipleship.

So let's go back to what Jesus wants us to hear:

"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."

Interestingly there is a bit more to this line that Jesus omits. In the original Isaiah passage, it reads:

to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,

Jesus omits this second bit about vengeance.

Jesus preaches Forgiveness. Not vengeance.

Jesus offers a vision of a righteous God –righteous --in the sense of a just and merciful God.

If we want to understand our mission as disciples of Christ it is here. If we want to understand our mission as Christians at Ascension Parish, it is here.

God's Grace for all:. We all come to church for a variety of reasons. Christ cares about all of them. God gives us grace for all our cares. Sometimes the suffering of others rises above our own, and Jesus asks us to care deeply and tenderly for others. We must not look away.

We are asked to bring the Good News of Christ—to those who are poor- poor in spirit, poor in joy, poor in health, or economic status. Later in Matthew we will hear: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:3). Those who recognize their spiritual needs and dependence on God are blessed. They will find a relationship with God and feel God's grace.

There was a study out of the University of Michigan (2010) that showed we are becoming less empathic as a society. More often, people emerging in our society believe that offering help to a person in distress is an option, not an obligation. This brings to mind the story of the Good Samaritan. Some who walked felt that to help was an option.

We are asked to bring the Good News of Christ to the blind—the Good News is a vision of hope, a vision of steadfast love, and self-giving. It is not a playbook for acquiring power and economic success at the cost of another's demise. It is prayer book that shines a light on our sacred commitment to lift one another up, each of God's beloved, ...up.

We are asked to release the bonds that ensnare and bind God's beloved. Jesus asks us to open the doors that close off and suppress the potential or well-being of any of God's beloved. For those who suffer under oppression, Jesus claims their right in God's world to be free.

Only then will we be able to proclaim the Year of the Lord's favor, a year of forgiveness and justice.

Last week I finished with a quote from Martin Luther King Jr. Today I will paraphrase a quote from the Rt. Rev Mariann Edgar Budde, the Episcopal Bishop of the Diocese of Washington DC.

NPR interview with Juana Summers January 22, 2025

She is referring to her most recent sermon at the Inaugural Prayer service at the Washington National Cathedral.

"I had been thinking about what is unity in a country as diverse, and in some estimations, as polarized as we are. So that's what got me started, the foundations of unity. [They are] respecting the dignity of every human being and honesty and humility. I was reflecting on

it and talking to different people, I realized there was a fourth [foundation]. And that was in a country - to be united as a country with so many, you know, riches of diversity, we need mercy. We need compassion. We need empathy." *I have added the words in brackets for clarity.*

Beloved, being a person of faith, and a follower of Jesus has never been easy.

Just ask Jesus.

But being a follower of Jesus is also an amazing privilege. It is a privilege to be asked to be bearers of the highest attributes of humankind. What an honor it is to know that we have been chosen to use our gifts to lighten the burden of another, and to offer opportunities to those in despair.

It is a privilege and a gift, to make straight a path in the wilderness on which to bring Hope and Joy in this world.

Amen