

The Beginning of the Good News

Ep 3 Yr C Luke 4:14-21 January 23, 2022
Rev. Peter Smith <http://www.stjamesuc.com>

Everyone in Nazareth has come to hear Jesus speak on the Sabbath. And Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah about the promise that a Saviour would come and that great things would happen. Good news would be proclaimed to the poor. The captives would be set free. The blind would regain their sight. The oppressed would find relief. And the Saviour would usher in the year of the Lord's favour. And then Jesus sits and the people watch him with expectation. And our reading continues with these words "Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus is the one promised in scripture. Through him the power of God is at work and the good news is being proclaimed. Those who have been trapped and burdened are now being released. Those who were blind are now starting to see. And those who were oppressed are being set free. For the time of celebration, of God's love and grace and mercy touching the land, has begun. And all of that is wonderful, and important and deserves our attention. All of that is incredible and life changing and good news of great joy. And all of that is merely the start.

Because Jesus doesn't read the prophet Isaiah and then say "all that has already happened and God's plan is now complete and finished." Yes, for some people great things have already taken place but Jesus is the embodiment of the promise of God and that promise is more than the poor hearing hopeful things, the captives being released, the blind seeing, or even the oppressed knowing relief. Which is why the gospel says "Then he began to say to them," the scripture is fulfilled.

Because God's Messiah comes to do more than simply tell the poor that there is hope. Jesus comes to change the world so that the promise of hope becomes a reality. The Saviour long awaited comes to do more than set the captives free. Jesus comes to release the prisoners and establish a world where there are no more captives. The Great Physician comes to do more than bring sight to the blind. Jesus comes to bring healing for all who suffer in mind, body, and spirit. The King of Kings comes to do more than bring relief to the oppressed. Jesus comes to shatter the powers that enslave so that everyone is free. For Jesus is the living embodiment of the year of the Lord's favour.

Now that phrase, the Year of the Lord's Favour is one that the people around Jesus would know and understand. Established in the Jewish law the year of the Lord's Favour, or the Year of Jubilee, happened at certain times and was when debts were erased, land was returned to families, and basically everyone got a fresh start. It was a time when mistakes were let go, bad history was forgiven, and life started anew not just for individuals but for all of society. A time when the blessings of God were received and celebrated and seen throughout the land.

And we know that Jesus comes to bring not just a year when those things happen but to begin the time when all those things and more are possible for us. The time when God's mercy and grace enter our lives and we become new people. For in his life, his death, and his resurrection, Jesus opens the way for us to let go of what was and start a future this day, right now, shaped by what God intends and wants for us.

That's why we pray in the Lord's Prayer "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Because we understand that the world God intends us to live in is built by and founded on love and grace. And as we pray, we promise to be God's people and share the mercy and hope which God gives to those around us. That our words, our actions, our lives will shine with the light of heaven to push back the shadows of fear and worry and exhaustion. We live on earth building the kingdom of heaven together- with Jesus showing us the way, the Holy Spirit working through us, and God blessing us richly.

For make no mistake about it God's grace and love, mercy and forgiveness transform the world through you and me, and all good people who do God's will here on earth. When seeking justice and resisting evil and refusing to accept what is happening when we know a better world is possible. When we live this day as if heaven is the only acceptable answer to the question of what life should be like.

That's why we say that we follow Jesus. We follow Jesus because Jesus is the way for us to know God and share God with the world. We follow Jesus because Jesus is the truth that God speaks to us so that we can have both knowledge and wisdom. We follow Jesus because Jesus is the life we are called to experience

and to live each and every day.

Because our faith don't end when we recognize Jesus as the Saviour, our spirituality isn't finished when we believe that he is the one sent from God. No, our faith starts with Jesus and our footsteps, our journey, our actions each and every day are how we live out our trust, our hope, and our belief in God. What we do when we are at home, at school, at work, and everywhere else is how we grow to be more holy and generous, more loving and blessed in our lives.

For Jesus calls us to follow, and offers us new life because we are poor, we are blind, we are captives, we are oppressed. Jesus teaches, heals, and dies on the cross because we are hurting and need forgiveness, are lost and need direction, are afraid and need grace. Because the good news is that God hears our cries and answers us with love. God sees our need and responds with mercy. God knows our lives and comes to us in Jesus.

And God's grace and love, mercy and forgiveness transform the world through you and me, and other people of faith, when we follow Jesus. When we let the light of Christ shine through by our patience and compassion, our caring and our peace. For the promise of God around salvation is found in the Bible, Jesus brings that promise to the world, and we are asked to live out that promise for everyone to see

For Jesus is the promise of heaven for our lives. Jesus is the promise of new life now and eternal life in the world to come. And we don't deserve that, we can't earn that, or do anything to make that happen. No, God gives all of that, God gives Jesus, to us. And that is good news. That is amazing and surprising and incredible. And remember what I said earlier that is actually only the start of the good news.

For after blessing us with Jesus, showing us what can be and reminding us that we are worthy and precious, then God invites us to live out the promise, the possibility, the new life which is ours through Jesus. To discover the gifts we have and the calling that is ours. To find our place within the new world which God wants and to create that world through our service and our love. And all of that begins now.