

Luke 4:14-21, 2016

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸"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,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰And 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. ²¹Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Luke 4:14-21, 2016

Today we hear the very first sermon Jesus preaches in His new ministry. It is pretty short.

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

The text Jesus has used as the basis for His sermon is one that the people will be familiar with and which has some history with them.

It comes from Isaiah 61:1-2.

In that passage the author claims the office of prophecy and the authority to speak for God.

Israel has been exiled from their land, their temple destroyed and they have been forced into slavery and servitude to their captors for many years.

Now this person or group comes to speak words of hope to the people.

Their claim is to have been given the power of the Holy Spirit and anointed for this work, and while they make this claim,

which anyone could do,

their identity is inextricably tied up with commitment to God's will,

unlike false prophets who claim divine authority but are unmasked by their commitment to self gain, not the good of others..

This is a commitment to be present as an agent of God's mercy to the broken and oppressed and as one announcing that after years of mourning the time had arrived,

in which God will restore the conditions of justice and peace that characterize God's reign.

As you read on in this passage from Isaiah what you discover is that this power is not hoarded by the those claiming authority but is passed on to the community recreating them,

To give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness and the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory,

They will be ministers of God, fulfilling God's holy purpose at the heart of which is God's justice and mercy.

It is clear that Israel's success was marginal at best.

But now, Jesus comes claiming that power and authority.

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

There is a great deal of talk about injustice in our world, our country and our own community these days.

I often struggle with figuring out what is just and what isn't.

The dilemma I encounter is, how is justice for one unjust for another?

One of the areas we see this is in the #BlackLivesMatter Movement.

Many would ask, as I have, "Don't all lives matter?" Of course they do!

But this focus on black lives seems to imply that those live matter more. That is not what they are saying,

but rather pointing out that it appears that the way our culture acts makes one think that we have collectively decided that black lives don't matter,

or at least not as much as white ones do.

An African American pastor who lives in a white neighborhood and has on various occasions been pulled over by the police for no other given reason than "They were doing their job," put it this way,

"When you see a house on fire and direct the firefighters to that house, you're not saying that all the other houses in the

neighborhood don't matter; you're saying this one especially matters because it's on fire. Right now our house is on fire.”

How do we meter out justice then in the light of police officers who daily place themselves in vulnerable situations.

To God all lives matter, and so to us all lives should matter.

I went to the monthly meeting of the Port Orange Ministerial Association this Wednesday and the new Executive Director of Halifax Urban Ministries was there to speak.

He commented on the movement in our community to provide a homeless shelter and the difficulties in pulling the community together to support that effort.

What he said was refreshing.

The position of HUM after all the wrangling that has gone on is that they will support and find ways to work with and in the shelter regardless of where it is build.

They recognize and accept that it will never be build in the downtown area of Daytona Beach where all the related services are, but will be west of I95,

and they will just figure out how to make it work.

Then this morning I saw the report on the local news about the homeless people camped out at the County Appraisers Office on North Beach Street.

It is kind of ironic that they would chose the office of the ones who have so much to do with housing in our area to camp out at.

I wonder if it was planned that way as a form of protest.

The homeless had been run out of their camps elsewhere and had relocated there.

At the first instance of someone feeling threatened by one of the homeless people the County Appraiser is moving out of the building.

I understand the fear and am not minimizing that or being critical of those who reported the incident that precipitated this move.

We all need to feel safe.

I have to ask, “Is there not a better way?”

In our gospel lesson Jesus says,

“The spirit of the Lord is upon 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, and let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

I read this and one of the difficulties I always have is who are the poor, the captives, blind and oppressed;

and how do the ones who might obviously be classified as the rich, the free, the sighted and the powerful,

hear the good news Jesus is supposedly bringing to all?

You are, I am, among the affluent in this community and the world.

We can't deny that fact, especially if the picture of those homeless people at the county offices is still lingering in your mind.

And so, as you hear this lesson you may hear that God cares for everyone else but you.

How do you hear the good news, the words of release, recovery and freedom in Jesus' message?

What does that have to do with you if it is for all these groups of people, none of which you identify with or believe you are a part of—

the poor, the captive, blind and oppressed, and this is a question that continues for us as we read through the stories about Jesus' ministry.

I need your help to understand this.

This is the first question I want you to answer on the sheet of paper I gave you.

How do you hear Jesus message for today?

Answer in just a few words, like 2 or 3. I have another question for you to answer in a few minutes. Do not put your name on them or sign them.

The other thing you may hear in this passage, and that many a preacher will say this weekend,

is that you are the ones who now are supposed to do what Jesus said he came to do,

because you are the body of Christ in the world today.

You are then left without the good news and additionally made responsible for all the work.

There has got to be more to this.

I challenge anyone who would say that the rich, the affluent the powerful have no problems.

It just isn't true. You know that.

Here comes your second question, and I might add that these questions can be answered regardless of your life situation.

In light of this passage, in light of the reality of your life, how are you poor, what holds you captive, what are you blind to, and what oppresses you?

Is it love and compassion, that you have not received or friendship and family that are missing that makes you poor?

Is it an addiction or fear that hold you captive?

Is it something about yourself, about your past, your character, your anger, resentment, your broken heart that you need to open your eyes to?

Is it a relationship, or again, past events or fear that oppresses you and keeps you from living the life you yearn for and that Jesus calls you to

and wants you to have?

Look, it doesn't matter if you are rich or poor,

God's justice and mercy is at the heart of His concern,

and God is concerned about all dimensions of human life,

and for every human He created.

His concern is for you whether you are black or white or brown or green;

even if you are homeless, poor or rich, captive or free, blind or sighted, oppressed or lifted up.

Our gospel story will continue next week and we will hear how the people respond to Jesus' sermon.

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

We will explore how they respond and how we respond to this news and your answers to these questions will be helpful in that.

God's justice and mercy is at the heart of His concern, and his concern is for you.

Amen

I would like for you to pass your little sheet of paper over to the center isle and I will collect them during the hymn. Again, don't put your name on them.