**SERMON Luke 4:14-21**

**Intro**

I wonder how long that uncomfortable silence actually lasted. What were the congregation thinking while their eyes were ‘fixed’ on Jesus as he walked back to his pew? Waiting for him to explain his choice of this particular passage, for his first day back in the synagogue of his childhood, around the very folks he grew up around. We’re told that Jesus “unrolled the scroll and found the place” (v.17b) that he wanted to read from. This was no arbitrary selection. And in choosing *this* passage from Isaiah, Jesus announces (among other things) “the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:19), the Year of Jubilee –that “all-bets-are-off year” that is described in detail all the way back in the Torah (Lev 25 to be exact).

The Year of Jubilee, though a limited period of time, had some pretty serious social and economic implications. Debts are forgiven, slaves are freed, and bad real estate transactions are redeemed. This way of living, the Way that God is said to favor, calls for the abolition of oppression and need, and where all suffering ceases. This favored way of living, would be quite unlike life as most people *typically* live, including Jesus’s listeners. To be honest, The Year of Jubilee, even then, all seemed a bit unrealistic for the real world, and for real people. It’s hardly a surprise that biblical scholars have always had their doubts about whether it was *ever* actually observed in Ancient Israel. And because The Year of Jubilee imagines a more hope-filled life than most know or believe is possible, it may be tempting to dismiss it as purely imaginary, even naïve.

But I want to suggest that in choosing these words from Isaiah to inaugurate his earthly ministry, Jesus was taking his place among the prophets of old. He was reviving the same prophetic vision for humanity as those who went before him. And it is this same prophetic vision that must be revived in the church of every generation.

**Link**

So, in reading: ***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,****19*** *to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,”* and proclaiming to all gathering that: **21***“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,”* Jesus is essentially saying: “This is what I’m going to be about.” I will be the prophet that is needed now!

**Passage**

The synagogue scene in our text today forms a kind of mission statement. It encompasses who Jesus is and what his ministry will be about. But, just to give us some context, we know something that Jesus’ hearers did not: Jesus had just been affirmed as the Son of God, God’s Beloved, when he was baptized by John in the River Jordan, and now this mission statement reiterates that proclamation. *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,”* quotes Jesus.

This scene is also sandwiched between two rejection stories. The first, is Jesus’ rejection of the devil’s temptations in the wilderness. Reminding us that when you commit your life to a prophetic vision, a higher purpose, a transformative calling, that “Yes” will mean you need to say “No” to other things.

Directly following our synagogue scene, is Nazareth’s rejection of Jesus. His mission, of course wasn’t simply to revive The Year of Jubilee, but to expand its liberative function waaay beyond a single year. Jesus was relating “the year of the Lord’s favor” to the Kingdom of God. A concept that the Gospel writer will introduced later in this chapter (4:43). But, as far as his own hometown was concerned, the implications were just too disruptive and unwelcome. It is the UCC minister Robyn Meyers that reminds us, “Prophets rarely tell us what we *want* to hear, but what we *need* to hear.” It is no surprise then that Jesus’ proclamation was understood as a threat to the status quo, the way things have always been. The Kingdom of God, we will discover as the ministry of Jesus continues, often gets that kind of reaction, especially from folks with something to loss: power, prestige, and profit.

**Today**

*But* it doesn’t have to be that nefarious. It’s easy to see why the prophetic nature of the Christian message often gets lost, particularly in places and amongst those who want to be seen as non-confrontational, good-mannered, or even likeable. Jesus’ proclamation will threaten and disrupt our own self-understanding.

*And*, as you might have guessed, today’s passage isn’t just about Jesus’ ministry back then, it is about the prophetic legacy he left behind for us to continue today. *We* are supposed to bring good news to the poor, release the captives, help the blind to see again, free the oppressed and proclaim that God’s favored time…is…now!

**Passage**

The importance of the reading of Isaiah in this scene can scarcely be exaggerated. Our gospel writer has already carefully woven songs and sighs for justice and redemption in his opening chapters…most notably in Mary’s Magnificat: **152** *“He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly;* **53** *he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.”* And it is justice and redemption that are echoed again in Jesus’ reading of Isaiah.

For Luke, it is of crucial importance that the social concerns that would deeply shape Jesus’ ministry as the Son of God are clearly stated. The main activity and purpose of the Spirit’s anointing Jesus is this attention to the social justice concerns of the day. The Anointed One is sent to the poor and oppressed, to not just say good things, but to enact good things for them.

There will always be those who say that such a vision is at best unrealistic, and at worst a threat to society. The prophet Amos (5:24) knew this reaction all-too-well and yet still declared, *“let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.”*

**Today**

For who would dare bring the good news of raised wages, bargaining rights and quality healthcare to the poor?

Who would dare declare release to the captives, reform to a discriminatory judicial system, an end cash bail, or the death penalty for that matter?

Who would dare proclaim recovery of sight to the blind, particularly when that blindness is towards the treatment of immigrants, minority, and vulnerable groups?

Who would dare send the oppressed to their freedom, without counting the financial impact and political cost?

Will you dare to pick up this prophetic mantle? *Now* is the moment of the Lord’s favor. Today is the day and this is what I’m going to be about, says Jesus. What are you going to do? After all, this call was never meant to be the solitary task of Jesus, it is the prophetic mission and vision of the whole community, the Body of Christ.

**Conclusion: Season of Epiphany**

This season as we have been celebrating the growing light of the days, and through the lighting of candles throughout the sanctuary, may the spreading of the light be symbolic of what it means to revive that the prophetic vision Isaiah, and of Jesus. As you leave here do so in the power of the Spirit of God to continue the prophetic work of bringing about the light of justice in our world. We have been sent to “bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and set the oppressed free.” Amen.