

Luke 4:14-30
Afflicting the Comfortable
1.17.21

This past December 13th

The 3rd Sunday of Advent

The given text was Isaiah 61

The text Jesus preaches here in today's scripture.

Our text, scholars call Jesus' inaugural sermon.

They call it an inaugural sermon

Because it is his first public address

Following his baptism

And wilderness experience.

It is a fitting text then

Since we anticipate a presidential inauguration

This coming Wednesday, January 20th.

We will hear President Biden

Give his inauguration speech.

And in it, the citizens of the United States

Will hear the President's vision and agenda

On what to expect from him and his administration

Over the course of the next four years.

As divided as this nation is

There are those who already vehemently oppose

The newly installed president.

Their hearts have already hardened
To what the president will have to say.

In some ways, this is not unlike our scripture today.

Jesus declares a vision and agenda in his inaugural sermon
And his audience's response ends up violent.

Now I say Jesus' inaugural *sermon*
As opposed to the president's inaugural *address*.

For there are differences.

So what constitutes a sermon?

A sermon has to include particular things.

1. It needs to be built around Scripture
2. It needs to include Good News
3. It needs to speak truth to the powers and principalities
4. And it needs to invoke God's holy presence.

It has to have one more thing.

A sermon has to have what somebody once said
A "today-ness" to it.

A sermon is more than a history or theology lesson.

For a sermon transcends time and place.

It touches the heart of the contemporary listener.

If a sermon doesn't speak to us in some way
It misses its objective.

As Dr. Jerusha Neal of Duke Divinity School explains
In her commentary from *Working Preacher*

*Preaching doesn't just teach something
It does something.*

It will move someone in some way.

It can either hardened the heart or transform it
Depending on the heart's openness to the Spirit.

Listeners can respond in either a heartfelt embrace
Or a hostile rejection of the message.

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When Jesus was born
The angel announced that good news of great joy
Has come for ALL people.

And the angels, shepherds and wise men
All came to worship Baby Jesus.

But Herod, upon hearing the news
Sent an army to kill all males 2 years and under
Within the region of Bethlehem
Hoping to squelch this Good News.

And previous to today's lesson
John the Baptist baptizes Jesus
In preparation for his ministry.

John preaches a sermon filled with the Spirit
Calling church leaders a brood of vipers.

Well, obviously, that's not going to win him new converts.

Herod arrests him and throws him in prison
And eventually John is beheaded.

And as we see hear in today's passage
This particular day does not end well with Jesus.

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When Jesus finishes reading the passage
He hands the scroll back to the attendant
And says to all

Luke 4:21b NLT “The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”

²² Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips. “How can this be?” they asked. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

Well and good, his audience is receptive to his message

But then he goes on and says they won't accept him
Even in his own hometown of Nazareth.

Well, they will . . . as long as he preaches
What they want to hear.

But Jesus is not finished preaching.

Luke 4:25 NLT “Certainly there were many needy widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a severe famine devastated the land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a foreigner—a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon. ²⁷ And many in Israel had leprosy in the time of the prophet Elisha, but the only one healed was Naaman, a Syrian.”

This may not hit us as it hit the inhabitants of Nazareth.

But the two examples Jesus used

The prophet Elijah and the widow of Zarephath
And the prophet Elisha and the Syrian Naaman.
Would have been very familiar stories.

Except without the emphasis on the ethnicity of the subjects.

Jesus’ listeners just assumed

That God’s blessings were for the people of Israel
And not necessarily for anyone else.

And so Jesus turns this thinking upside

By saying God’s blessings went to foreigners
Rather than the people of Israel.

What Jesus is telling his audience there in the synagogue
Is what he continued to say throughout his ministry.

Those who thought **were** in God’s realm of blessings
Including Jesus’ neighbors in Nazareth, **weren’t**.

And those who thought **were** in the realm of God's blessings
Weren't.

Are you with me?

The attitude of the audience changed immediately.

They were furious.

So furious, they ran Jesus out of town
And tried to push him off a cliff!

And to think, this occurred during Jesus' inaugural sermon.

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So why all this anger at Jesus?

Why this sudden turn of emotions?

Well, when you preach Good News to the poor
What are you preaching to the ones
Who keep the poor, poor?

Or when you preach release of the captive
What are you preaching to those
Who keep the captive, captive?

Or when you preach letting the oppress go free
What are you preaching to those
Who keep the oppressed, oppressed?

The way I figure

If it is Good News to the poor

It is probably bad news to the rich.

If it is Good News to the oppressed

It's probably bad news to the oppressor.

And if it is Good News to the captive

It's probably bad news to the captor.

Am I right?

When you comfort the afflicted

You might end up afflicting the comfortable.

And that certainly is what Jesus did throughout his ministry.

He peeved the status quo

By raising up the downtrodden, the marginalized

And the oppressed.

Jesus provoke his neighbors

By saying this Good News

Is for the powerless and the powerful.

And his neighbors didn't like it.

And the scribes and Pharisees didn't like it.

And King Herod didn't like it.

And Pontius Pilate didn't like it.

And Jesus ends up dying on the cross

Fueled by all this hostility from those in power.

Because this kind of preaching
Threatens positions of power!

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Later on, in the Gospel of Luke
Jesus preaches what's called the Sermon on the Plain.

After giving similar blessings to the poor
The hungry, those who weep
As he did in the Beatitudes
Found in the Gospel of Matthew

Unlike the Beatitudes, he includes a series of woes.

Luke 6:24-26 NRSV

²⁴ **“But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.**

²⁵ **“Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.**

**“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.**

²⁶ **“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is
what their ancestors did to the false prophets.**

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In today's passage
Jesus preaches his inaugural sermon.

In it

- He preaches scripture
- He preaches Good News
- He preaches truth to power
- He preaches in the strength of the Spirit

Yet, his neighbors' hearts were hardened.

They responded with violence.

These are his own neighbors, mind you
They know him and his family.

They were so impressed with Jesus
They had to ask one another
Is not this Joseph's son?

And yet, **these** very neighbors try to push Jesus off the cliff!

Conflict always seem to follow the Good News.

Because when you start preaching about change
You are stepping on the toes of the status quo.

When you preach Good News to the powerless
You end up threatening the powerful.

This is what Jesus' inaugural sermon looked like.

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So will there be any similarities
Between Jesus' inaugural sermon
And Biden's inaugural speech this Wednesday?

Well, I certainly hope so.

I certainly hope Biden will address
The same social concerns the Gospel does.

That is the duty of the president.

To comfort the afflicted, and yes
To afflict the comfortable.

To raise up the underprivileged, the poor and the oppressed.

To create equitable opportunities
For all within the nation's borders

These are expectations of a president:

However, I don't expect him to offer anything else
That Jesus Christ offers in his Gospel or Good News.

I shouldn't have to say this but . . . I will
The President of the United States is not our Savior.

Jesus Christ is.

Because Christ and Christ alone
Brings a life-giving message of salvation
Through the atonement of sins
Expressed in his death on the cross

Christ alone offers eternal life.

Christ alone offers peace and hope in life
That the world cannot give nor take away.

Something no president can ever do
Though some talk like they can.

So let us give our support to our newly elected president.

Let us pray for him and his administration.

Let us pray for Congress

And let us work together united in our causes
To build a just, equitable and peaceful society

Because as Martin Luther King Jr.
Whose day we celebrate tomorrow said

*"Injustice anywhere is a threat to **justice** everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."*

We must work for liberty and justice for all!

As Jesus said, **to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.**

Amen! Lord, may it be so.