

**The Third Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**Luke 4:14-21**

**January 23, 2022**  
**Pr. Eric L. Murray**  
**St. Andrew, Franklin**

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**O**ne Wednesday night this past Advent, Pastor Pauline shared with you a favorite song of ours by the blues vocalist Gregory Porter. It begins,  
*Well, they gild their houses in preparation for the King  
 And they line the sidewalks  
 With every sort of shiny thing  
 They will be surprised  
 When they hear him say*

*Take me to the alley  
 Take me to the afflicted ones  
 Take me to the lonely ones  
 That somehow lost their way*

In today's Gospel reading, there is no mention of the people of Nazareth gilding their houses or lining the sidewalks with shiny things in preparation for Jesus' homecoming. Nonetheless they were greatly anticipating his visit. They had heard the reports about their hometown neighbor and the praise he was receiving all throughout the countryside. With that kind of reputation preceding Jesus, his home town was expecting big things from him.

But, on that Sabbath day in the synagogue when Jesus stood up to read,  
*They will be surprised  
 When they hear him say*

*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."*

They would be surprised, because Jesus' fellow Jews would have recognized that Jesus had cut the reading short. He had read, "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," leaving off, "...and the day of vengeance of our God."

In fact, Jesus went out of his way to omit the whole next section of Isaiah.

In the omitted section Isaiah makes the claim that Israel would have for itself the wealth of the nations, while all its enemies would end up with nothing, nothing, but God's vengeance heaped upon them.

Jesus synagogue audience would be surprised he omits this ideology emphasizing instead "the year of the Lord's favor". In Isaiah this is a clear reference to the year of Jubilee, that once in a generation observance of God's radical liberation.

In practical terms The Year of Jubilee meant that

- the land would be liberated, left fallow for a year, so that the soil might be renewed and enriched.
- Slaves or indentured servants would be liberated.
- and, all people would be liberated from indebtedness, their loans forgiven.

Every 50th year, this radical liberation was to be declared throughout Israel. They will be surprised that it is this Isaiah text, with its direct connection to Jubilee, which Jesus chose to read. But, this was **THE *moment*** when Jesus declared for the first time publicly his purpose, clearly defining what his mission was, and what it was not. And, Jesus was defining his mission as one of radical liberation.

Finally, Jesus synagogue audience *will be surprised when they hear him say, Today! Today this scripture—what I have said, and what I have purposefully left out— this liberation has been fulfilled in your hearing.*

Today, not in some future time, today this radical liberation has been fulfilled.

I wonder if the Nazarenes could hear the "Today" of Jesus? Sitting there in the gilded house of their synagogue, could they hear his TODAY?

What about us? Can we hear the "Today" of Jesus? With our way-too-busy, constantly-in-motion lives and the cacophony of the 24 hours-a-day, news and social media information stream flooding our mind and spirit can we hear Jesus speaking to our Today?

Or, do we dismiss Jesus' teaching as some past work of God that's just not all that practical today?

Or do we dismiss Jesus' mission as a future promise which will someday be fulfilled by God in heaven?

If so, does that leave us sitting in our gilded house of worship waiting in preparation for the king, only to be surprised that Christ is already out there...bringing liberation...today!

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The author, Brian McLaren in his book *A New Kind of Christianity* writes  
*Everyone agrees the poor and downtrodden should be helped someday,  
 oppression and exploitation should be stopped someday,  
 the planet should be healed someday,  
 we should study war no more someday.*

*But for Jesus, the dream of Isaiah....*

*of a time when good news would come  
 to the poor, the prisoners, the blind,  
 the oppressed, and the indebted —*

*[that] dream was being fulfilled today*

To which I would add *and everyday.*

*Because everyday is today.*

*So, McLaren goes on to write, The time has come today to cancel debts, to forgive, to treat enemies as neighbors, to share your bread with the hungry and your clothes with the naked...to confront oppressors not with [violence], but with unarmed kindness!*

*Today, Jesus said, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*

I'm thinking it's likely that Jesus' synagogue audience nearly 2,000 years ago couldn't comprehend Jesus' "today". After all, they were still captive to their oppressors, the Roman Empire.

Yet, if they had ears to hear, then in their hearing, even while still captive, their liberation would be fulfilled already.

Like Jesus' first century hearers, TODAY this scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing also. Liberation is ours also, TODAY, even while we are still captive. Even while we are captive to empire, to consumerism, to addiction, to pandemic,...to you name it. Even in the midst of all that liberation is ours TODAY

Jesus' mission is not relegated to the past. Jesus' declaration of Jubilee, of radical liberation, even in the midst of ongoing captivity just as insistent on this Sunday morning as it was on that Sabbath day in Nazareth.

Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. If you have the ears to hear. If you can awaken to the present moment, the TODAY, the NOW and be in that moment long enough to receive God's radical liberation.

The renowned peace activist and Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hahn wrote,

*"The problem that faces us is the problem of awakening.*

*What we lack is not an ideology or doctrine  
that will save the world.*

*What we lack is mindfulness of what we are...*

*The way of salvation is a new culture  
in which human beings are encouraged  
to rediscover their deepest nature."*

No matter what tries to hold you captive. No matter that you look around and still see signs of poverty, captivity, blindness, oppression, TODAY you are liberated. In Christ that is your deepest nature.

Does that surprise you? Are you still waiting for Christ to act....someday?

It's time to stop waiting. TODAY this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. TODAY, you get to join in Jesus' mission of liberating the whole world.

**SURPRISE!**