

Sermon – Epiphany 3 – St Luke and St Matthew, Brooklyn

Luke 4: 14-21

There are many things that new immigrants to a country should learn. We need to come to understand how the laws of the country work, the currency and how to get about. We also should learn about the culture, sport and the many festivals and celebrations that are held.

And then we must make sense of the political system. I'm tempted to comment on the past 35 days more but I won't. Immigrants coming from countries that are based on the Westminster parliamentary system, often with monarchs, find the republic system of the United States somewhat bewildering. I know I did. The whole system here was devised as a repudiation of the Westminster parliamentary system and the monarchy. On the whole it is a good system and is certainly upheld as the model democratic system of republic-based government in the world.

The three equal parts of the government – executive, legislature and judiciary, operate with a healthy level of checks and balances as mandated by the Constitution. Normally! The election of the President that draws the most attention. After often bruising campaigns, the people elect and the electoral college confirms the president elect of the United States of America.

As you well know the following January the President is inaugurated. Once the President is sworn into office, he, maybe she soon, will step to the podium and deliver the inaugural address. The eyes of the world are affixed upon the new president. Every president since the republic was founded has delivered an inaugural address. George Washington's second address in 1793 was the shortest at 135 words. William Harrison's in 1841 was the longest at 1 hour and 45 minutes, delivered apparently without hat or coat in a howling snowstorm. It was more than foolish as he died a month later from pneumonia.

The whole point of the inaugural address is to set the scene and provide a vision for the president's four-year term of office. After a difficult campaign the speech might aim to unite a divided nation. It might offer hope with lofty goals or it might offer only a detailed political agenda. Many speeches have contained memorable lines and most invoked God in some way or other. Often, they looked back to history and then sought to project their ideals forward.

The gospel passage from Luke this morning offers us the first words Jesus spoke in his ministry. This was Jesus' inauguration if you like. He read from the book of the prophet Isaiah. What Luke recorded though was not just one passage from Isaiah but two. Jesus, it would appear had deliberately chosen the passages from Isaiah because it set the vision for his ministry and kept the message upbeat.

In this moment Jesus was reaching back into history, indicating the link that he had to the prophecy of God, and then firmly anchoring himself in the present by declaring that the prophecy had been fulfilled in the attendees' hearing. His ministry was the future as well and he would go on to live out his promise of fulfillment of the prophecy by taking the good news to

the poor, releasing the captives, recovering sight for the blind and letting the oppressed go free. It was indeed a time of the Lord's favor. All recorded in our canon of scripture.

There is a cacophony of words uttered every day, everywhere around us. Words matter and often there comes a set of words that are uplifting and life changing. Jimmy Carter invoked the prophetic words of the prophet Micah (6:8) in his inauguration speech. "And what does the Lord require of you. To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." JFK uttered the memorable line "ask not what America will do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

The words that Jesus uttered mattered a great deal then and matter as much, if not more now. As followers of Jesus Christ these words are inextricably bound to us in the spirit that was instilled in us at our baptism. The spirit of God was upon Jesus after his baptism by John. The spirit came in the form of a very visual dove and settled upon him. The holy spirit was sent to us at Pentecost so that we would have a counsellor and not feel abandoned after Jesus ascension. This promise has been fulfilled.

Jesus was anointed to bring the good news to the poor. He was incarnate from God for the specific purpose of taking the good news that was promised in the prophecies of God out into the world. He called men and women to join him and many of them did immediately, recognizing the rightness of his call. The good news was that Jesus was the messiah, the holy one of God, that fulfilled the promise of the Law.

Good news is only good we might say for those living in discomfort. Good news offers hope for a different and better experience than before. We are all fallen people and live with the discomfort of knowing that we sin and fall short of the glory of God. Some can admit the discomfort, however there are many people who are not able to recognize the discomfort they feel in their souls as arising from their actions. Either way these people might be understood as the captives. Those trapped in poverty, sickness, and loneliness. They might be physically captive in jails or detention centers, or they might be captive in a home or institution, bullied and abused. Captive people are all around us waiting for good news and for release.

Jesus also wanted to recover the sight of the blind. There are those of course who are physically blind and there are those that are spiritually blind. Jesus ministry was all about opening the eyes and our hearts of all people to the good news that we could be freed from slavery and restored to our rightful place alongside Jesus. When we study scripture and when we hear God's message we can often have the feeling of waking up to something that had been hidden from us. Recovering sight is a truly liberating experience.

Similarly, many people in the ancient world and in our world today are oppressed. Many people in this area of Brooklyn remain oppressed. Jesus wanted to free all people from oppression, whether it was from slavery, economic hardship, addiction, mental illness or racism. The scriptural message of justice is key today as it was in Adam's day. Micah proclaimed that Jesus wants us to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with him. Everyone should be a

beneficiary of Jesus' love, justice and mercy. Take the foot of my neck and allow me to stand up we can exclaim.

Finally, Jesus came to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. His ministry encompassed the principles of the jubilee year as set out in the Law. The Jubilee year came around every fifty years and was a time of rebalancing the community so it would be stable and well-functioning. If land had been lost for any reason, especially through unjust practices, it was to be returned to the original owner. Debts were to be voided, freeing people from debt slavery, one way they would lose their land. Can you imagine our world today if this practice had been continued? It is almost unimaginable.

Jesus' ministry was one of persistent love, justice and mercy. He taught in many places, healed the sick, released the captives, gave sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free and proclaimed the year of the Lord's favor. This was the messianic mission, the epiphany of God's glory in action. The originality of Jesus was not that he lived out these ideals but that he proclaimed that the ancient prophecy had been fulfilled in his life.

We now have the responsibility to carry on Jesus' ministry and messianic mission. We each have our own God-given gifts and talents and we come together as the body of Christ to live out this mission. We may think that Jesus became human like us through his birth, but we now discover that we are invited to become human like him and take up his cross and live out this ministry.

We are all bound together with Jesus, nourished by his life and incorporated into his mystical body. Our lives are conformed to his by the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. In him we find peace, love, mercy and justice, balm for our souls and light for the world. May it be so for us too.

Amen.