



Grace Lutheran

Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

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3rd Sunday after Epiphany: January 27, 2019

Sermon Title: "Restore to Original Factory Setting"

Gospel Text: Luke 4:14-21

I confess I was tempted to focus upon our lesson from Nehemiah today. What a preacher's dream! He spoke for nearly SIX hours and the people couldn't get enough! They were transformed by the word interpreted.

Today Jesus shows up at the synagogue.

He's handed the Isaiah scroll.

He unrolls it.

He finds the passage he intends to interpret-

"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."

And he sits down.

The eyes of all are fixed upon him as the words just hang there.

Then he preaches one sentence:

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

What can this mean?

Certainly, we can say that in proclaiming that the anointed one has been sent, the epiphany, the AHA moment, is that Jesus is the Word of God embodied and fulfilled.

But, what other epiphanies might we hear today?

One might be found in what Jesus does not say. His first audience knows he's reading from Isaiah and he leaves a sentence unfinished. He leaves it hanging. After he proclaims "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me"... and continues to the point of proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor, he stops. The rest of that phrase, left unsaid and unheard, is what is also being proclaimed in Isaiah but not here- "the day of the vengeance of our God."

Imagine how we would hear this passage if the last words we heard were "day of vengeance" hanging in the air.

Biblical scholars debate whether this next phrase is or is not in Isaiah, but most translations that we have include it. And I for one wonder about that- “the day of vengeance of our God.”

What’s Jesus up to?

Perhaps, today we might hear that word, “vengeance,” in the desires we feed; the insecurities or hurts we hold onto; things that can lead us away from grasping God’s vision. Or conjure up people getting “what they deserve.” Your fate is about your choices, what is that to me?

Maybe some assume that their vision on such things aligns with God’s.

Maybe people had grown to do that in Jesus’ day did too.

What might Jesus want us to hear today?

In Isaiah, that word “vengeance” is not so much revenge or retribution, as is it about reversal and renewal. To put it in one modern day context, imagine your computer or phone is crashing and tech support tells you to click that scary option of “restore original factory settings.”

What on earth might happen if we lose all our “preferences”?

But that setting will give everything a fresh start no matter how it got glitchy.

This reversal in Scripture terms, is God’s fulfillment of promises deeply rooted now being made real in Jesus.

This was what salvation proclaimed was about, going all the way back to Leviticus 25 where the law said- every 50 years all those made captive because of indebtedness were freed, and debts were cancelled. Property taken on account of those debts was returned to the original owners.

It was a giant “restore to original factory settings” called Jubilee. Leviticus says of such a time- “take a break from taking advantage of one another... If you do this you will live secure, the land will yield and you will have all you need.”

You don’t need to feed your insecurities and settle scores or decide people deserve what they get.

But... since God knows that we do and we will, God will restore.

There’s no evidence that Jubilee was ever observed. It seemed too impractical. Especially if you now HAVE and want to KEEP- favor for others doesn’t seem so great in that light.

However, there’s plenty of evidence that people still needed, and need, a re-boot- to have God’s word interpreted in our world and reality.

I hope and believe that’s part of what draws us here.

So God’s word can revive our souls, our grief can be turned to joy and our brokenness reshaped to remember what God’s heart is for all people.

This is what Jesus comes to proclaim.

God is about restarting and renewal. To keep society from spinning out of control in the midst of everything that has the capacity to enslave us or keep us from flourishing. That's beautiful.

But I still wonder...

How can Jesus just sit down and make this wild claim that Scripture IS fulfilled right then and there?

Sometimes we look around and perhaps think, "that favor you speak of, where is it?"

The people in Isaiah were returning home from exile, with hopes of promise. And yet, the gap between promise and reality is great. The promised land was in ruin and needed to be rebuilt.

Sometimes we too look around and feel that too.

If we look a little more closely we see that Jesus doesn't say that every prisoner WAS released, or every oppressed person WAS set free. What Jesus says is that the coming of all that IS proclaimed- is upon those who hear. Like a light dawning. Little by little.

Starting with being seen by God, even and especially where we feel the lowest of low. For those times we feel so marginalized, we scarcely register on the the radar. That's good news!

Whoever and wherever you are this day, part of God's favor and release is hearing the "original and true factory setting" about you- you are loved and seen by God no matter what you and your life look like today in your eyes or the eyes of others.

This is God's proclamation from the very beginning in Luke, echoing all the way back to Mary's song in the Magnificat- as the favored one sings, "Lord, you have looked upon the lowly, and filled the hungry with good things."

This is who God is and what God does and wherever Jesus is- salvation comes, communities are transformed.

In Luke, over and over, this song of God's favor bubbles up in revelations of the kingdom.

And it continues as we, the baptized, share in the Spirit of the Lord upon us and our world.

We are a part of what was proclaimed continuing to be reality, in revelations of the kingdom of God, ushered in by the Spirit.

In her book, *Come Be My Light*, Mother Teresa tells of visiting a man in a tiny one room shack made of tin and cardboard. In one corner, she spied an oil lamp that was dirty and full of dirt. She asked him, "why don't you light this lamp?" "For whom?" He replied, "months and months and no one visits me." She asked if he would light it if one of the sisters came. He consented. Regularly, a sister

would visit him for a little while and he would light the lamp. Then one day he sent word, "Tell, Mother, my friend, the light she lit in my life is still burning."

So it is with our lives, I think. We take turns keeping the light burning in each other's lives. Pointing to Christ, in little grace-filled reminders that restore us in the midst of all of our moments of spiritual suspense between the promise and the experiencing.

The Taize community sings a simple song:
"The kingdom of God is justice and peace
And joy in the Holy Spirit
Come, Lord and open in us the gates of your kingdom."
May it be so.