

3rd Sunday of Epiphany, January 23, 2022

Scripture: Luke 4: 14-21

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Jesus Ministry Platform

Jesus stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." In today's gospel we have Jesus outlining his ministry platform as politicians do when they are running for election. His ministry platform happens to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, given over 600 years before.

Two weeks ago we celebrated Jesus' baptism and rejoiced in his anointing by the Holy Spirit when he was raised from the water. This was at the start of his public ministry and Jesus decided to return home to Nazareth and as you can imagine, News of Jesus' preaching and miracles would have gotten back to his people in Nazareth before he arrived there.

And we must surmise that there was great anticipation as those who had known Jesus and his family for many years waited to see what everyone was talking about. Was Joseph and Mary's really as good as they were hearing? Had he changed in some way?

As usual, Jesus went to the synagogue on the Saturday when he returned home. The synagogue, for Jesus' people, was like our local church, meeting the spiritual needs of a local community on a weekly basis.

Someone would read from a scroll, out of Deuteronomy, the She-ma: "Hear O Israel, the Lord God is one." Then there would be a time of prayer. Someone would then take the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses, and read a passage from it.

Everyone would praise the Lord, have prayer again, and then thank God for the Pentateuch. (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Following that, another attendant would invite an older man or visitor to read from the prophets.

The scroll was read, and then followed a time for the reader to comment on the text. This is the role that Jesus performed on this occasion, reading from the

scroll. Finally, there was a time of praising the Lord for what was spoken out of the prophets, prayer, and lunch.

Jesus reads from the book of Isaiah. The book of Isaiah is one that steadily moves from naming the troubles that the people are facing towards the goal of the establishing the Lord's kingdom on earth, Chapter 61, from which Jesus quotes, is referring to this goal. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

The majority, perhaps 80% of Israel, were considered poor. The theology of Jesus' day was that riches showed that you had God's approval, and poverty suggested you had done something to displease him. Jesus opposed this and pointed out that wealth was an enormous obstacle to entry into the kingdom of God.

Jesus wasn't just talking about the materially disadvantaged here, but those who feel like they are spiritually poor. Those who feel powerless, spiritually oppressed, like they have no connection to God. Jesus was talking to those people who felt they were in need of a Saviour.

Jesus was providing great hope for those who were turning to him in their need and poverty. Such people can receive faith, renewed strength and resiliency, through the Holy Spirit working in them.

Jesus said: He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus' ministry platform was all about setting the people free. What does being free mean to you?

Another of Jesus' platforms is recovery of sight for the blind. We know that as Jesus' ministry progressed, there were stories of him physically restoring sight to the blind. Bartimaeus comes to mind here.

But Jesus was also in the business of restoring spiritual blindness of his people, and certainly social blindness, when addressing the Pharisees and Sadducees governmental bodies, those who had the power to change the social structures within the communities. Jesus was never quiet in responding and referring to them in their roles of struggle of his people. Restoring sight to the blind, no matter the cause of the blindness, was on Jesus' ministry platform.

Some of us are sitting blind, in need of this promised restoration from Jesus. We are blind to the requirements of the kingdom, we are blind to outreached hands of God, we are blind to the needs of each other. We pray for our sight to be restored today, and we pray for each other's sight to be restored as well....

The final item on Jesus' ministry platform list is to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Every fifty years the Jews enjoyed a 'Jubilee Year'. At this time land was restored to its original owners, slaves were set free, and debts cancelled. It was a new start for people, wiping out the past.

Jesus brought in a new age of salvation. Through him people can be restored to God, people can be freed from being bound in their own prisons so sin, doubt, guilt. People's debt to God has been paid. Jesus' people and now we can celebrate a life of jubilee, instead of waiting for a specific time to reap the benefits.

This is the time of of Lord's favour, and what a beautiful time it is.... Last week the lectionary reading was the one where Jesus transformed the water into wine. Something ordinary became extraordinary. The Spirit does that in our lives. Jesus' ministry promises were to bring comfort to the poor, free the oppressed, restore sight to the blind, and let the people know that God is in their corner , and that the Holy Spirit is working working for their Good. Jesus brings in a new kingdom where God's grace and favour are generously shown to those who are in need. What good news.....!

Then after the pronouncements, Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were transfixed upon him, and he said to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus wants us to be open to the anointing of the spirit, the same spirit that worked in him, prompting him to realize and to clarify his ministry tasks. That spirit is with us in all things reminding us that Jesus has done the work, so that we can be free of all things which bind us.

Reminding us of God's favours When things are difficult as well as when things are easier, Setting us free to enjoy the life that God wants us to have. Opening our eyes to God's ways. Giving us forgiveness, freedom from guilt, and eternal life. Let us live that life in the power of the Spirit, Amen....

Prayers of the People

Lord, we wait with eager expectation for the coming of Your kingdom when the humble will be exalted and the hungry fed. Your kingdom come, Your will be done.

Lord, we celebrate your Epiphany's light with searching minds and contrite hearts, trusting in Your healing spirit and redemptive love. Your kingdom comes, Your will be done.

Lord, we watch with those who wait and weep, longing to see the rule of justice and the reign of peace. Your kingdom comes, Your will be done.

Lord, we seek You among the despised and rejected, knowing that there we will find Your light shining in the dark. Your kingdom comes, Your will be done.

Lord, we proclaim sight to the blind and liberty to the oppressed, trusting in Your tender mercy and passion for justice. Your kingdom comes, Your will be done.

Lord we pray for our shut ins, that your favour may continually rest upon them..... we pray for this in our hearts...

Lord, we work with others to proclaim Your truth, challenging the mighty and raising the meek. Your kingdom comes, Your will be done.

Lord, we wrestle with our hopes and our fears, our struggles and our joys laboring with creation to come to new birth. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Blessing

The Spirit of God is upon you and has anointed you.

You are the salt of the earth and you bring light to the world.

You are not too young or too old, you are not too rich or too needy to bring good news to the impoverished, to give a hand to the broken-hearted, and to live out freedom and pardon through the gifts you have been given.

So remember to pack peace in your toolbox, hope in your briefcase, love in your lunch box, and may integrity, honesty, and joy be your designer wear of choice.

Do not be frightened, for you are never alone.

The God in whose image you are made will walk with you and guide you today, tomorrow, and every day. Amen.