

Sermon: We must be daring and bold Psalm 19 Luke 4:14-21

The Psalmist proclaimed,

“The heavens declare the glory of God.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world”.

And Luke’s Gospel has a nice ring to it, as well; proclaiming good news and freedom; but truth be told, it also has foreboding for Jesus. The latter part of Jesus’ message; that “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”; is received with both amazement and skepticism because Jesus was a hometown kid. To some of the folks in His hometown synagogue, Jesus was seen as nothing more than a poor Nazarene. So, shortly after saying these words, Jesus was ushered to the edge of town to be thrown off a cliff. Why, you might ask. The folks in the synagogue thought that Jesus was speaking exclusively about them, when in fact Jesus was referring to all God’s people; even the Gentiles. These words were a call to action to serve both those inside the synagogue and everyone outside it, and this was infuriating.

Sometimes words get in the way of the message. St. Francis of Assisi is believed to have said, 'Preach the gospel at all times. And if necessary, use words'. Whether Francis said these words or not, Luke’s message today is said plainly. Often described as Jesus’ first sermon; the way He began His public ministry; what Jesus said is indeed straightforward. He read from the prophet Isaiah, who wrote,

“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,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

What is this year of the Lord’s favour; also known as the year of jubilee? Simply put, it is liberation; freedom. Isaiah was reminding us of God's steadfast love and concern for the oppressed and broken-hearted. Amid life's twists and turns; trials and tribulations; we are assured of God's favour, justice, and the hope of His forever commitment to us. Isaiah's words transcend time; inspiring us to continue seeking, recognizing, and rejoicing in God's evolving work in our lives and the people of our community. Isaiah’s announcement also includes comfort for those who mourn, beauty instead of ashes, gladness instead of mourning, and praise instead of despair. The First Coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ at Christmas is the perfect manifestation of this grace from God, and on this day in Nazareth, Jesus stands up to proclaim His revolutionary mission: that He was the promised Messiah of Israel and that He had come directly from God to address the enormous humanitarian crisis on earth. By this, the people would understand that Jesus meant that He, Himself, was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. And He is not simply declaring that the Saviour is *somewhere* in the world. Rather, He is saying that He is the One with them (with you) now. Jesus revealed that He would address poverty, sorrow, bondage, suffering, and oppression. He had come to fulfil God's promise to His people. Jesus had come to set up His glorious kingdom on earth. But here's the part of Jesus’ message we must return to: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing".

So often, we make faith too complicated. We use words to defend personal preferences

rather than the purpose of the gospel. The seven deadly words of the church; "We have always done it this way". Sometimes, we use words that complicate and divide rather than unite – us/them, we/they. We use words that take away from living that is intentional, clearly understood, and straightforward; sometimes leaving us with little hope of changing and moving forward with God's gracious and faithful love for all. This is the deeper meaning behind the words Jesus used. "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" points to the enduring truth of Jesus, and if it is our intention to be more like Him, then we must make what Jesus said shape who we are and what we do.

Martin Luther King Day was celebrated recently. It's always the third Monday in January. Dr. King said,

"Everybody can be great because anybody can serve.

You don't have to have a college degree to serve.

You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve.

You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve.

You only need a heart full of grace and a soul generated by love."

Prior to this passage today, Luke records that Jesus was baptized and then went into the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil. Both events establish the connection between God, you, me, and all God's people. In Matthew's Gospel we learn that when Jesus went to be baptized, John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you." But Jesus answered, saying, "Let it be so; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness". Righteousness, or right living; making how we live centred on God; is a choice we make. We know this because of what happened when Jesus was in the wilderness. He needed to choose a way of living that honours God, and we need to make our choice too. Baptism connects us to God in Jesus' name; we call it becoming a covenant member of the church; not to make our lives easy, but to enrich us with God's Spirit and empower us to choose grace over judgment, engagement over indifference, and forgiveness over revenge. When that forty-day trial in the wilderness ended, where did Jesus go? Filled with the Spirit, Jesus went back to Nazareth. He went home.

For those of you reading this sermon: Have you returned home?

Following the covid pandemic and getting out of the habit of attending Sunday worship, is it time for you to come home? We miss you and would like to see you.

That Jesus went home to preach is vital for you and me. You see, we think *The Great Commission*; 'to go into *all* the world'; is where we need to be, but we can live into the gospel message where we spend our every days, in whatever place God calls us to be. It doesn't matter our circumstance; where we live, where we work, where we go to school, where we play, or where we worship. The way Jesus lived is the model we need to help us proclaim the gospel message with fewer words and lots of love right where we find ourselves.

Once again, look at where Jesus opened the scroll.

"God 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."

God's intention is that we; His people and followers of Jesus; will pay particular attention to people who are afflicted and bound and blind; the least, the last, and the lost. This is the simple truth that stands at the heart of the gospel; that God's love is for everyone; not just a privileged

few; not just the folks we already know. And how do so many people respond? As I mentioned at the outset, many people, and churches, live with an us/them, we/they attitude. We view people as 'the other', right or wrong, in or out. By doing this, we impoverish our own vision; indeed, the vision of Christ's church in the kingdom of God on earth. Our mission is to lift people up wherever they live, work, play, and worship, and to value people who are different than ourselves simply because *they are* God's holy people, and deserve to be treated as brothers and sisters in Christ; one God, one faith, one church.

Friends; it is true that the challenge of the gospel is simple and straight forward, but not always easy. I say this because; while we are fortunate people; the love and grace of Jesus does not allow us to stay fixed in one place. We are the church; reformed and always reforming. It prompts us to value God's purpose rather than our personal preferences. And to be the church; Christ's church; we must be daring and bold enough to step beyond traditional and cultural boundaries to encounter what God is doing in new and radical ways. Can we (can you) be daring enough to live into the truth which is at the very heart of the gospel; the truth proclaimed by Jesus: To free *ourselves* from our own limitations, and to boldly go where God wants us to be? And to go with grace and love; love for God, love for God's kingdom on earth, love for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, love for Christ's church, and love for our friends and those yet to be. Arise, your light is come. To God be the glory in your walk of faith today and tomorrow. Amen.

I hope to see you in person soon as you are able. God bless you.

Robert