

Lets Have a Jubilee

Luke 4:14-21

Chapelwood 1/24/10

I have to tell you, I have always wanted to preach this text. It is in my top 10. I mean its awesome...who wouldn't want to just get up and proclaim something...just throw down the gauntlet. When i saw that this was the story for today, I thought cross one off the bucket list.

But i have learned, once again this week, to be careful what you wish for.

As fun as it might seem this is not an easy text to preach. Rhetorically, it lacks an "in", a hook. It is not a miracle or a sweeping epic; it is not a parable with images to be unpacked. It is, in essence a thesis statement.

Luke, being the educated and talented writer that he is, uses this story to sumerize Jesus's ministry in Galilee. It is the abstract for the next 5 chapters.

And to make matters worse, it stops in the middle. The lectionary for today cuts Jesus off... mid-sermon...and neither the cowboys aren't even playing today.

But splitting this story in two emphasizes Jesus's last words and crystalizes for us a moment of incredible joy and great challenge.

We are very early in Luke's story. John baptized Jesus, and Jesus was led to the wilderness. He returns now to Galilee, and begins his public ministry, pretty much the same way pastors do today...with a sermon in his home

congregation. It was common, in those days, for two or three teachers to read and comment on the scriptures. Already there was a set cycle for reading Torah-- I like to think that congregation heard Leviticus 25 or Numbers 36—and speakers chose coordinate readings from the writings and the prophets. As was tradition Jesus stands to read, he chooses these words from Isaiah, and he sits, as was tradition, to expound on them. So it is natural that all eyes in the synagogue were on him, because even then everyone always listened to sermons with rapt attention.

But Jesus doesn't expound on the scripture. Jesus sits in the synagogue and proclaims the Year of Jubilee. <poppers/> Exactly! This is a moment of incredible joy! Shoot fire crackers, shout, dance. This is a cause for celebration.

I think sometimes we miss that because we aren't familiar with Jubilee. I walked around this week saying "I'm going to talk about the year of Jubilee" and I got "The waahhh....?" But this is a momentous event.

The Year of Jubilee was an ancient tradition and a time of great joy. Leviticus sets out: after every 7 sets of 7 years, or every 50 years, was to be a time of great liberation. Debts were forgiven lands returned and slaves set free. It was set as a time of incredible grace and restoration in praise of God's incredible grace and restoration of the Israelite people.

There's only one problem... From the time of Moses and Leviticus to the time of Jesus, there is no evidence that the Year of Jubilee every happened. In fact Jeremiah tells how a king tried to institute the year of Jubilee..... people went out of there way to get around it. Lands were

returned....and then taken back. Slaves were freed....and then taken back...

The Year of Jubilee is a beautiful ideal. But its very hard to practice. It runs completely counter to all our worldly notions... and so it became other worldly.

The Jubilee came to be associated with the coming Messiah. Jubilee became the Kingdom of God. It was to be God's next great salvation. The people of Israel would be freed from bondage... They would see their crippling debts forgiven. The people of Israel would be raised out from under the heel of the Roman Empire.

Politically and economically the centuries between Moses and Jesus had not been kind to the Israelites. Yet Jesus sits in the synagogue of this small town in a poverty stricken all-but-forgotten backwater of the Roman Empire and proclaims the fulfillment of the Jubilee!. It is no wonder the next verse says "all were amazed and spoke well of him". Who in that congregation couldn't use a little Jubilee... Who in this congregation couldn't use a little Jubilee. This is a moment of incredible joy.

And it should come as no surprise. After all, this is Luke, a gospel of joy. It is in Luke the angels proclaim good news and tidings of great joy. It is in Luke John leaps for joy in Elizabeth's womb. It is in Luke that Simon and Anna see the child Jesus in the temple and weep for Joy.

Luke is a gospel of incredible joy...but also a gospel of great challenge.

If you don't already know, this story ends with Jesus being run out of town. (come back next week)

He is run out of town, Because when He proclaims the Jubilee in Nazareth...It is not just for that congregation. It is not just for the people of Israel. Christ comes to proclaim the Jubilee, the Kingdom of God for all the world.

Hear the good news, we live in the Jubilee. All the troubles that bind you are already released. The sins and mistakes that oppress you are already forgiven. We are a people who have been restored, and whom God is restoring daily, hourly, constantly. There is incredible joy in that...but also great challenge.

There are still Nazareths in this world. Christ proclaims the Jubilee, the Kingdom of God for all. Yet there are still debt ridden, poverty stricken all but forgotten human rights backwaters in this world.

Many of them are places we don't talk about. Though there is one, we can't help but talk about lately. In the last two weeks Haiti has been devastated by two major earthquakes. And they are in desperate need of every ounce of attention and prayer and assistance they receive. But they were in need of attention and prayer and assistance long before this.

Before the quake Port Au Prince had the physical and political infrastructure to support 250,000 people...2 million people lived there. Before the quake, half the population could not read. Before the quake, 80 percent of house holds, 80 percent of households lived below the United Nations poverty line. That means 8 out of every 10 people lived on less than 2 US dollars a day. Before quake.

There are still Nazareths in this world, and they don't need our pity. They need access to education to release every child from the shackles

of ignorance. They need the crippling debts run up by famine and corrupt leaders forgiven. They need oppressive subsidies and tariffs lifted so farmers can compete in their own markets. They need a Jubilee.

This is a moment of incredible joy...and great challenge. To live in the Jubilee means we are released from all the chains that bind us...and our eyes are open to the chains that bind others. It means we can let go of the fear and sadness that oppress us...and be free to fight the oppression of others.

This is Luke's thesis, and Christ's call to us to live in the Jubilee
to bring good news to the poor.
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."

May it be fulfilled by our hearing.