

Luke 1: 1-4; 4: 14-21

**Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account
of the events that have been fulfilled among us,
just as they were handed on to us
by those who from the beginning were
eyewitnesses and servants of the word,
I too decided,
after investigating everything carefully from the very first,
to write an orderly account for you,
most excellent Theophilus,
so that you many know the truth
concerning the things about which you have been instructed.**

**Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit,
returned to Galilee,
and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.
He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.
When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up,
he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day,
as was his custom.
He stood up to read,
and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.
He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:
“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 rolled up the scroll,
gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.
The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.
then he began to say to them:
“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Meditation

If there is one piece of advice that I heard more often
than others during the holiday season it is this:
do not talk about religion nor politics and all will be fine!

And I have often been advised to stay away from politics at the pulpit...
don't go there...people will be upset!

Well folks...

I'm going to 'go there'...but not in a specific way...
I'm going to 'go there' there in a general way...
and I'm doing so because that is our reading today...
and because that is the Biblical Tradition...
and because that is the faith that we explore each week...

If you are willing, please hear me out...
and then you can join me for coffee and we can have a conversation
whether you agree or disagree with me or not.

Today's reading records a profound moment in Jesus' life, according to Luke.
In the first paragraph, Luke tells his patron or sponsor that he can trust
what he has written, because Luke has investigated very carefully
and has written it down in an orderly fashion.

and then we jump to chapter 4 when Jesus arrives back in his hometown,
goes to the synagogue...as was his custom, by the way,
apparently so that we will know he was a good, law abiding Jew...
and Jesus stands up to read.

Now, this in and of itself is not outstanding.

All adult Jewish men taught in the synagogue...

that was an adult male responsibility...

but apparently Jesus didn't read the reading of the day.

He unrolled the scroll and had to find what he was looking for.

Interesting detail!

Oftentimes people who disagree with certain parts of church tradition

are criticized for being cafeteria believers....

for picking and choosing what they pay attention to.

Jesus apparently did the same thing.

So Jesus finds what he is looking for ...

and with all eyes on him reads from the prophet Isaiah:

“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.”

Then he rolls up the scroll and sits down.

Then, because they are still staring at him he says:

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Can you feel the silence?!

I bet you could have heard a pin drop!

When Jesus quotes the prophet of Isaiah

and talks about freedom and healing and good news to the poor...

this wasn't simply about being nice or kind or compassionate...

These actions would have had political implications and

would have upset the balance of power.

because good news to the poor would be bad news for the rich...

and the rich, then as well as now, are the ones most often in power.

On top of all that something else that I find very interesting is that Jesus is echoing what is often called the Magnificat.

A couple of chapters earlier in Luke, chapter 1: verses 46 though 53...

Mary, Jesus' mother, proclaims in part:

the mighty one has done great things for me,...

he has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones

and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away empty.”

For Mary to talk about bringing down the powerful, sending the rich away empty and

lifting up the poor and filling the hungry with good things...

these were politically threatening statements.

Apparently the apple doesn't fall far from the tree...

Apparently, Jesus sees his mission carrying out his mother's vision.

**And Jesus absolutely knew the political implications
of his teaching and preaching.**

That is why the Romans crucified him...

**he was politically as well as religiously threatening
to the Powers of his time.**

Well..so much for Jesus.

He did what was his to do...

but how about for us... in our time and place?

What is ours to do?

Our faith is not simply an intellectual assent to a set of doctrines and creed.

It is, in fact, a way of life.

**Jesus never asked to be worshiped or praised,
but he invited many people to follow him.**

**Whether they did so literally by traveling with him or
whether they went back home to their families and communities
he invited people to follow him into a different consciousness:
one of abundance and compassion
one of forgiveness and generosity
one of celebration, joy and love.**

**These weren't heady intellectual or philosophical ideas
they were meant to be LIVED realities.**

Whether you were hungry for food or for love,

**the followers of Jesus were and are called to feed you.
Whether you were held captive by poverty or illness,
the followers of Jesus were and are called
to liberate you and heal you as far as
physically, emotionally and spiritually possible.**

**As recounted in Jack Kornfield's book: No time like the present(p. 237),
Gandhi once explained: "Those who say spirituality has nothing to do with politics do not
know what spirituality really means."
Kornfield goes on to say "[that] this is not partisan.
It is standing up for basic human principles—
moral action and the prevention of harm.
It is the embodiment of loving awareness amid the troubles of the world."**

**We cannot show up in church and feel good about ourselves
if other people are starving and/or freezing in the cold.
We cannot show up in church and feel good about ourselves
if their heat has been shut off because they cannot pay their bill
or if their children go to school hungry because there is no food
in the pantry.**

**As his followers we are called to live and vote his mission and
his purpose which we claim as our faith.**

**Some where along the way over the past 2,000 years it has become
much more important to profess belief in Jesus as the only Son of God
rather than to live his way of life.**

**The word politics comes from the Greek word meaning: affairs of the cities.
Cities are not entities in and of themselves. Cities are made of people.
So politics is about the affairs and the needs of the people.**

**So is it about the affairs and needs of a few people?
the people in power? the people with money?**

or all the people?

**All the people including the rich and the powerful
but also including the powerless people...**

the poor people...

the sick people...

the imprisoned people...

the migrant people...

the voiceless people...

We all know what Jesus would say...

wDo you know what your answer would be?

amen.