



Sunday, January 27, 2019

Rev. Robert W. Brown

SERMON

Filled Up to Pour Out

Luke 4:14-21

INTRODUCTION:

Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel of Luke. This is part one of a two-part story that tells us how Jesus began his public ministry. Next week, Jean will preach on part two. The reading today might not end as a cliff-hanger, but believe me, wait until you hear what happens next week!

Previously, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was initiated just as all Christians are today. He was baptized. You remember though that Jesus was particularly singled out by the Holy Spirit as she appeared as a dove, and then a heavenly voice called out "my child, the beloved". Directly after this astounding launch into his ministry, The Holy Spirit does **not** send him to Jerusalem to take over the temple. Instead he is led into the deep desert. Alone in the barren wilderness, Jesus fasts and prays. Toward the end of his seclusion, he wards off the powerfully seductive temptations of the devil himself.

Emerging from this grueling retreat, Jesus returns to civilization and begins a teaching tour in synagogues all over greater Galilee. The people rave about him. Jesus is literally the talk of the town as he returns to his hometown of Nazareth. The people are thrilled and pack the venue in anticipation. But, spoiler alert...things are about to go very bad, very quick (That's next week). Today we begin with the astounding message Jesus delivers at his homecoming.

Hear this reading from the Gospel of Luke Chapter 4 verses 14 through 21.



SCRIPTURE:

[After his 40 days in the desert,]

Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee,
and news about him spread throughout
the surrounding countryside.
He began to teach in their synagogues
and was praised by all.

Now Jesus came to Nazareth,
where he had been brought up,
and went into 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 proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and the regaining of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Then he rolled up the scroll,
gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.

The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Then he began to tell them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled even
as you heard it being read.”

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The Word of God leading us to be a people of God...

Have you ever wondered *why* God thought it was a good idea for Jesus to come to us in flesh & blood knowing how the story would play out? What was so critically important that it required this dramatic and very short 3-year ministry? What did God really want us to understand? Well, many say that this “inaugural address” that Jesus gave spells it flat out. But first, let us pray...

*Our God of mercy, our God who is love, fill us to overflowing this morning, so that we might take our part in the grand celestial flow that is poured out on all creation. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you our rock and our redeemer. AMEN.*

The first rule you learn in “*Public Speaking 101*”, or in seminary they called it, “*The Basics Of Preaching*”, is to state your premise at the very beginning and then, reason it out so you can restate it with authority at the end. Personally, (as you regulars might have noticed) I don’t always subscribe to the rules. I think that sometimes it’s better to make your listeners wonder where the heck you’re going. Curiosity might keep people interested. But today the thesis statement is clearly stated up front in this scripture.

Jesus returns to his tiny hometown of Nazareth, riding on a huge wave of buzz. All of Galilee enthralled with this wandering preacher, Jesus. Who was this uncredentialed, rookie evangelist? Jesus was gaining fame like the singer Beyoncé! All the people in Nazareth knew was that he was getting rave reviews. He was praised by all who heard him, and now, here he is, in our own little hamlet, in our tiny synagogue. I imagine every one of the few hundred people who lived in the town packed the place that day with great anticipation.

“Maybe he’s a prophet who will tell us when these horrible Romans will be annihilated.”

“I heard he can heal people just by talking with them.”

“I’ll bet he came to finance a new, modern Synagogue.”

The synagogue was bursting at the seams. No one dared to miss this. Finally, Jesus stood up to read, the room went still as the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. Slowly, he unrolled the parchment and found the place where he wanted to read...

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and the regaining of sight to the blind,  
to set free those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Everyone in the packed synagogue stared in dumbfounded silence as he carefully rolled up the scroll. He gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. You see, they all knew that “the year of the Lord’s favor” was about the *Great Jubilee*. They all knew that the great prophet Isaiah was referring to the dawning of a new era, a time of liberation, restoration, and homecoming. “Is he saying that the realm of God is near?” “Will we finally be free of these Roman tyrants?” “Certainly, this little flash-in-the-pan celebrity preacher man is not the messiah! “Quiet! What will he say?”

After a long awkward moment Jesus looked slowly around the hushed room. Nobody was even breathing. And he said to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled even as you heard it being read.”

The crowd erupted! Jesus just scored the game winning touchdown in overtime! Jehovah was on the move! Their days of oppression were coming to an end. Liberation was at hand. Jesus was crystal clear, this text in Isaiah is his foundational premise that will be lived out throughout his short ministry; above all, Jesus came to “lift up the lowly”. The promised *Great Jubilee* will come first of all not to the rich but to the poor, to the disadvantaged and downtrodden; that man with a sign begging for money at Fresh Pond Circle, that single mother living with her children in a state sponsored hotel room, those refugees who left everything behind to walk 800 miles with their children believing that there must be a better future in the United States, if only they could get there. Jesus clearly said that the *Great Jubilee* was here and now and everyone in that jam-packed synagogue qualified to be among the first, but no one in that room could possibly imagine or even guess what it would cost to usher in “*the year of the Lord’s favor*”. It would require Jesus and all who would follow him to empty themselves for the sake of others.

Remember when Jesus came out of the desert he was filled up with “*the power of the Spirit*” and again, the Isaiah text also begins with, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.*” This *power of the Holy Spirit* that Jesus is filled up with is only

given so that it can be poured out, first to the disadvantaged and downtrodden. When we ask God to fill us to overflowing so that we might take our part in the *Great Jubilee*, it means that, like Jesus, we must be willing to pour out every drop of that blessing to the most vulnerable among us. Can we risk being filled up only to pour out? I hope so because I think that is what our vision statement is asking of us. To honor God through service and mission is to first be filled up with power of the Holy Spirit and then eagerly pour out everything we have for the sake of a new era, a time of release to the captives, the dismantling of unjust systems and the restoration of the poor and oppressed.

It may seem too great a cost to pour out all this goodness and blessing. You might very well think that there is simply not enough and we must protect what we've been given or we'll be empty too. But, this idea of Jubilee isn't only for the benefit of the poor - it's also for the health and wellbeing of society as a whole.

Everyone benefits when liberty and vision extend across the land; that's the heart of "Jubilee." And so, following the Way of Jesus, as it turns out, isn't about our own salvation or fearfully protecting all God has given us; it's about participating with God in the restoration of the most vulnerable, proclaiming good news to the poor, and helping to build a world worthy of that proclamation. Jesus begins his public teaching filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and is compelled to serve those who need it most. And he will pour everything out, only to be filled again!

It's not only Jesus who can participate in the "fulfillment" of scripture; as the Body of Christ, we, too, are invited to courageously dive into the grand celestial flow that is the perpetual filling up and pouring out and filling again, like a waterwheel of divine love. God is never static. God is the perpetual flow.

Are we willing to risk pouring out our lives for the sake of others? Do we really believe that once emptied, God will fill us up again? How might our lives embody this mission and what service might we risk together to participate in the fulfillment God's justice?

I might be wrong, but it seems to me that God became flesh so that we too might be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and *proclaim good news to the poor*. Following in the Way of Jesus, we too must be first filled with God's power so that we can empty ourselves out for the release of the captives and

the restoration of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, and to proclaim “the year of the Lord’s favor.”

This “scripture” we study is not just merely words on a page. This is our “script” for how to live a truly meaningful life. This is a script just waiting to be brought to life and we have been cast to play a role!

But, let us study these words carefully because this is also a script that can easily be misunderstood - even to the point of enraged, misguided murder! But that’s for next week, when Jean will focus on the rest of this inaugural story in the Gospel of Luke. I promise, it is literally is a cliff-hanger.