



THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JANUARY 27, 2019

LUKE 4: 14-21

“THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS”

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He 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,

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 fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

- ONE SUNDAY MORNING, LITTLE ALEX WAS STANDING IN THE LOBBY OF HIS CHURCH LOOKING AT A PLAQUE THAT HUNG THERE. THE PLAQUE WAS COVERED WITH NAMES AND SMALL AMERICAN FLAGS. THE PASTOR CAME UP AND ALEX ASKED HIM, “PASTOR, WHAT IS THIS?”
- “WELL, SON, IT’S A MEMORIAL TO ALL THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE DIED IN THE SERVICE.”
- ALEX PAUSED FOR A MOMENT AND THEN ASKED, “WHICH ONE? THE 9:00 OR 10:30?”

- LAST WEEK AFTER WORSHIP, PHIL HERMAN MENTIONED THAT ONLY FIVE PEOPLE ATTENDED WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE MARTIN LUTHER'S LAST SERMON. LUTHER WAS UPSET, WENT HOME, AND DIED SHORTLY THEREAFTER. HE DIDN'T DIE BECAUSE THERE WERE ONLY FIVE PEOPLE PRESENT, BUT THE STORY DID RAISE THE QUESTION FOR ME "DO SERMONS MATTER?"
- I DON'T MEAN "DO LIKE A PARTICULAR SERMON" OR WILL ANYONE CONSIDER THIS A "GOOD SERMON."
- RATHER, WILL THIS SERMON CHANGE ANYONE'S LIFE THIS MORNING? WILL THIS SERMON ALTER THE WAY YOU IMAGE GOD? WILL THIS SERMON TRANSFORM THE WAY YOU THINK IN SOME SMALL WAY?
- OR DO WE JUST GATHER ON SUNDAY MORNING, GO THROUGH THE MOTIONS, AND WALK OUT EXACTLY AS WE WALKED IN?
- THIS MORNING, *JESUS' SERMON* IS CONSIDERED HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS. IT GOT ME THINKING: WHAT HAVE PRESIDENTS PROCLAIMED IN THEIR INAUGURAL ADDRESSES?
- YALE UNIVERSITY HAS OUR PREVIOUS PRESIDENTS' INAUGURAL ADDRESSES ARCHIVED ONLINE.
- AND DOESN'T AN INAUGURAL ADDRESS ATTEMPT TO INSPIRE US WITH THE PRESIDENT'S DREAM FOR OUR COUNTRY?
- "LET US RESOLVE THAT WE THE PEOPLE WILL BUILD AN AMERICAN SOCIETY IN WHICH ALL OF US—WHITE AND BLACK, RICH AND POOR, YOUNG AND OLD—WILL GO FORWARD TOGETHER ARM IN ARM. AGAIN, LET US REMEMBER THAT THOUGH OUR HERITAGE IS ONE OF BLOOD LINES FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE EARTH, WE ARE ALL AMERICANS PLEDGED TO CARRY ON THIS LAST, BEST HOPE OF MAN ON EARTH." **RONALD REAGAN.**

- THE DIVIDE OF RACE HAS BEEN AMERICA'S CONSTANT CURSE. AND EACH NEW WAVE OF IMMIGRANTS GIVES NEW TARGETS TO OLD PREJUDICES. PREJUDICE AND CONTEMPT, CLOAKED IN THE PRETENSE OF RELIGIOUS OR POLITICAL CONVICTION ARE NO DIFFERENT. THESE FORCES HAVE NEARLY DESTROYED OUR NATION IN THE PAST. THEY PLAGUE US STILL." **BILL CLINTON**
- "WHEN THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE WAS FIRST READ IN PUBLIC AND THE LIBERTY BELL SOUNDED IN CELEBRATION, A WITNESS SAID, "IT RANG AS IF IT MEANT SOMETHING." IN OUR TIME IT MEANS SOMETHING STILL. AMERICA, IN THIS YOUNG CENTURY, PROCLAIMS LIBERTY THROUGHOUT ALL THE WORLD, AND TO ALL THE INHABITANTS THEREOF." **GEORGE W. BUSH**
- "FOR AS MUCH AS GOVERNMENT CAN DO AND MUST DO, IT IS ULTIMATELY THE FAITH AND DETERMINATION OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE UPON WHICH THIS NATION RELIES. IT IS THE KINDNESS TO TAKE IN A STRANGER WHEN THE LEVEES BREAK, THE SELFLESSNESS OF WORKERS WHO WOULD RATHER CUT THEIR HOURS THAN SEE FRIENDS LOSE THEIR JOB, WHICH SEES US THROUGH OUR DARKEST HOURS. IT IS THE FIREFIGHTER'S COURAGE TO STORM A STAIRCASE FILLED WITH SMOKE, BUT ALSO A PARENT'S WILLINGNESS TO NURTURE A CHILD, THAT FINALLY DECIDES OUR FATE." **BARACK OBAMA**
- HEARING THE WORDS OF FOUR FORMER PRESIDENTS, IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT, FOR EACH, THE DREAM FOR OUR COUNTRY TRANSCENDS US AS INDIVIDUALS WITH OUR OWN PERSONAL NEEDS. THE DREAM IS BIGGER THAN ALL OF US AND CALLS US TO BE AND DO MORE FOR THE COMMON GOOD.
- AS A YOUNG ADOLESCENT, JFK INSPIRED ME WHEN HE PROCLAIMED, "ASK NOT WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN DO FOR YOU, BUT WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR COUNTRY."

- SO, THIS MORNING WE HEAR JESUS' INAUGURAL ADDRESS:
 - THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS ON ME
BECAUSE HE HAS APPOINTED ME
TO PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR.
HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM FREEDOM FOR THE PRISONERS
AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,
TO SET THE OPPRESSED FREE,
TO PROCLAIM THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR.

- JESUS IS QUOTING THE BOOK OF ISAIAH FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT, EXCEPT JESUS ROLLS UP THE SCROLL, HANDS IT TO THE ATTENDANT HAVING DELETED THE NEXT LINE IN THE QUOTATION.

- AS LUTHERANS, WE LOOK TO JESUS BEFORE WE LOOK AT THE SCRIPTURES. OUR PRIMARY RELATIONSHIP IS WITH A PERSON, NOT A BOOK. THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO SEE THE WORDS OF THE BIBLE AS WITHOUT ERROR, ENFORCING A LITERALISM THAT THE VERY AUTHORS DO NOT ENFORCE, END UP DISTORTING THE LIVING SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST.

- BECAUSE THE LINE JESUS DELETES IS THIS: **“AND THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF OUR GOD.”**

- JESUS, AS A RABBI, AMAZES PEOPLE BECAUSE HE TEACHES WITH AUTHORITY.

- AND HIS AUTHORITY IS SUCH THAT HE PLAYS LOOSE WITH SCRIPTURE, IMPLYING PEOPLE HAVE DISTORTED AND MISINTERPRETED THE IMAGE OF GOD.

- IN MANY WAYS, THE ISRAELITES INTERPRETED THEIR RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE FILTER OF A BIG HUMAN DADDY IN THE SKY REWARDING US IF WE'RE GOOD AND PUNISHING US IF WE'RE BAD. THIS IS A GOD OF CONDITIONAL LOVE. DO WHAT I SAY AND I LOVE YOU. DON'T DO WHAT I SAY AND I WILL PUNISH YOU.

- AND I AM 100% SURE THAT EACH OF US HAVE OUR OWN VERSION OF THIS KIND OF FATHER AND THEN, TO SOME EXTENT, WE ALL GET CAUGHT BY OUR OWN DISTORTED VERSION OF GOD THE FATHER.
- IF WE CAME HOME BY CURFEW TIME, WE WOULD GOOD WITH OLD DAD. IF WE CAME HOME LATE, WE WERE IN BIG TROUBLE.
- AND SO, WILL THIS SERMON MAKE A DIFFERENCE? WILL IT BEGIN TO CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK ABOUT GOD? WILL YOU CATCH YOURSELF THE NEXT TIME YOU GET A LITTLE FEARFUL THAT WHAT YOU SAY OR DO WILL BRING DOWN THE WRATH OF GOD ON YOU?
- JESUS, GOD IN THE FLESH, ELIMINATES THE OLD TESTAMENT VERSE FROM ISAIAH BECAUSE **GOD IS NOT A GOD OF VENGEANCE.**
- AND WILL THIS CHANGE THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT ONE ANOTHER? BECAUSE IF OUR GOD REMAINS A GOD OF VENGEANCE, THEN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER WILL CONTAIN VENGEANCE.
- IN EVERY RELATIONSHIP WE HAVE, WE ARE GOING TO HURT ONE ANOTHER. THIS IS A GIVEN. WE ARE GOING TO MISUNDERSTAND AND BE MISUNDERSTOOD. WE ARE GOING TO MESS UP AND PEOPLE ARE GOING TO MESS WITH US. AND IF A GOD OF VENGEANCE STILL LURKS IN OUR SOULS, WE WILL HOLD ONTO OUR HURT, PUNISH THE OTHER IN SOME WAY AND BE UNABLE TO LET GO IN ACCEPTANCE AND FORGIVENESS BECAUSE ANOTHER PERSON IS FRAGILE HUMAN MATERIAL.
- WHO WE HAVE AS OUR GOD COLORS EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES.
- **JESUS IS REJECTING A GOD OF RETRIBUTION AND REVEALING A GOD OF RESTORATION....**
- NOW JESUS' VISION OF A FATHER GOD IS IDEALISTIC. NO WAY AROUND IT.

- IT IS A WORLD WHERE THE POOR ARE LIFTED OUT OF MISERY. WHERE OUR EYES ARE OPENED TO OUR SPIRITUAL IGNORANCE AND BLINDNESS. WHERE ALL WHO ARE BOUND IN CHAINS OF ANY KIND ARE SET FREE. AND WHERE PEOPLE WHO ARE DOMINATED BY THE ABUSE OF POWER AND CONTROL ARE FREED.
- IT MAKES ME THINK OF NORMAN ROCKWELL, WHO PAINTED IDEALISTIC IMAGES OF HOME, FAMILY, AND COUNTRY.
- OPEN THE BULLETIN INSERT AND LOOK AT THE TWO ROCKWELL PAINTINGS ON THE INSIDE RIGHT. YOU SEE THE PAINTING, "FREEDOM FROM WANT" DEPICTING A HAPPY FAMILY GATHERED AROUND THE THANKSGIVING TABLE WITH A LOVING GRANDMOTHERLY FIGURE PLACING A HUGE TURKEY AT THE CENTER OF THE FEAST.
- "FREEDOM FROM FEAR" SHOWS A MOTHER TUCKING HER LITTLE ONES INTO BED WHILE A DOTING FATHER LOOKS ON.
- THIS IS NOT REALITY FOR MOST OF OUR COUNTRY, LET ALONE THE WORLD.
- MILLIONS IN OUR COUNTRY ARE FOOD POOR. AND THE EXTENDED FAMILY HAPPILY GATHERED AROUND THE TABLE SELDOM OCCURS ANYMORE.
- TODAY, MORE THAN EVER, LITTLE ONES DON'T HAVE A FATHER LOOKING ON AT BEDTIME AND OFTEN MOM IS HAGGARD, ANXIOUS, DEPRESSED, IF NOT ADDICTED.
- I'M STILL HAUNTED BY THE STORY LAST YEAR OF AN INFANT WHO SLOWLY STARVED TO DEATH IN HER SECOND FLOOR CRIB BECAUSE BOTH HER PARENTS HAD OVERDOSED AND DIED IN THE LIVING ROOM.
- ROCKWELL HIMSELF DID NOT LIVE IN THE WORLD HE PAINTED. HE HAD ANYTHING BUT A PEACEFUL AND LOVING HOME LIFE. THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE HE SUFFERED SUSTAINED BOUTS OF DEPRESSION. HE MARRIED THREE

TIMES. HIS SON, TOM, DEVELOPED AN ULCER AND HAD TO DROP OUT OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, OVERWHELMED BY THE ACADEMIC PRESSURE. TOM ALSO SUFFERED FROM DEPRESSION AS DID ROCKWELL'S SECOND WIFE WHO PASSED AWAY IN HER SLEEP AFTER THREE DECADES OF TURBULENT MARRIAGE. HIS THIRD WIFE, MOLLY, DID NOT ASK ROCKWELL'S THREE SONS TO SPEAK AT HIS FUNERAL. ROCKWELL DID NOT LIKE ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES AND DECLINED TO GO TO CHURCH THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE.

- YET, ALL HIS PAINTINGS ENVISION A LOVELY WHITE-PICKET-FENCE WORLD WHERE ALL IS JUST LIKE WE IMAGINED IT SHOULD BE.
- WHAT JESUS, ROCKWELL, AND OUR FORMER PRESIDENTS DO IS PROCLAIM THAT THE WORLD CAN BE BETTER THAN IT IS NOW. THAT WE CAN BE BETTER THAN WHO WE ARE IN THIS MOMENT. WE CAN BE MORE AND DO MORE. IT IS GOD'S INTENTION THAT WE FULFILL A DESTINY THAT LEAVES THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE THAN WHEN WE WERE BORN.
- THESE ARE PROCLAMATIONS OF HOPE: HERE IS WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE NOW. HERE IS WHAT IT COULD BE.
- I, TOO, AM AN IDEALIST. I, TOO, SEE WHAT WE ARE NOW AS A FAITH COMMUNITY AND I SEE WHAT WE MIGHT BECOME.
- WE WILL SOON UNVEIL A CAPITAL CAMPAIGN THAT SUPPORTS BRINGING CLC INTO THE 21ST WITH OUR MINISTRY: "CLC: A NEW VISION FOR SERVICE" WILL ALLOW US TO BE MORE FULLY "IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD FOR GOOD."
- ONE GOAL OF THE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN IS THE COMPLETE RENOVATION OF THE SOCIAL HALL. I DREAM OF OUR SOCIAL HALL BECOMING A COMMUNITY CENTER USED FOR A MYRIAD EVENTS AND MINISTRIES THAT ENCOURAGE FELLOWSHIP, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH. A GATHERING PLACE WHERE WE FEED THE HUNGRY, PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR THOSE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SOCIAL LADDER, AND

WELCOME OUR PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY PEOPLE TO USE THIS SPACE IN COUNTLESS WAYS.

- BEHIND THE SCENES, WE'RE WORKING TO RELAUNCH A CONTEMPORARY SERVICE WHICH WILL BE UPLIFTING, UPBEAT, AND SPEAK TO YOUNGER GENERATIONS. THE GREATEST CHALLENGE IS FINDING A COMMITTED AND CAPABLE GROUP OF MUSICIANS. IF YOU KNOW OF SOMEONE WHO IS A FINE GUITARIST OR BASS GUITARIST, PLEASE LET ME KNOW.
- WE CO-WROTE A \$10,000 GRANT WITH ANCHORPOINT COUNSELING WHICH, IF APPROVED, WILL ENABLE US TO LAUNCH A LOW-COST COUNSELING AND SUPPORT GROUP MINISTRY FOR MILLVALE IN THE FALL. MORE THAN EVER, PEOPLE ARE FALLING APART, PLAGUED BY ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION, ADDICTED TO VARIOUS SUBSTANCES. WE CAN DO SO MUCH MORE IN CARING FOR THOSE WHO HURT.
- YOUR STAFF, ADMIN TEAM, AND CONGREGATIONAL COUNCIL ARE MEETING IN RETREAT AFTER WORSHIP TO SET ACHIEVABLE GOALS AND SKETCH OUT EVENTS AND PROGRAMS FOR 2019.
- THE NEW SERIES AT FAITH AND FAMILY CAFÉ WILL BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO OPEN YOUR EYES TO SOME OF THE HEALING POSSIBILITIES IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD.
- I, TOO, HAVE A DREAM. A CONGREGATION WHERE NO ONE IS EXCLUDED. WHERE WE WORK TOGETHER TO SERVE THOSE IN WHATEVER NEED PRESENTS ITSELF AT THE DOOR. SUCH A DREAM CALL US TO TRANSCEND OUR INDIVIDUAL NEEDS AND NARROW PERSPECTIVES.
- STEP-BY-STEP, WE ARE SLOWLY PUTTING INTO PLACE MINISTRY THAT FURTHERS THE VISION CHRIST PRESENTS OF A GOD OF RESTORATION FOR THOSE WHO SUFFER AND CRY OUT FOR FREEDOM.

- I WISH I COULD TELL YOU THAT PEOPLE RESPONDED WITH AFFIRMATION AND ENTHUSIASM TO JESUS' INAUGURAL ADDRESS.
- WE'LL HEAR THE FULL STORY NEXT SUNDAY IN THE GOSPEL, BUT THE RESPONSE TO JESUS AS HE CONTINUES TO SPEAK TO THE PEOPLE IS THIS: "WHEN THEY HEARD THIS, ALL IN THE SYNAGOGUE WERE FILLED WITH RAGE. THEY GOT UP, DROVE HIM OUT OF TOWN, AND LED HIM TO THE BROW OF THE HILL ON WHICH THEIR TOWN WAS BUILT, SO THEY MIGHT HURL HIM OFF THE CLIFF."
- GOD IS TELLING US HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO TRANSCEND OUR LITTLE MINDS AND SELF-CENTERED PERSPECTIVES FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL.
- YET THE GOSPEL CALLS US GET OURSELVES FREE, OPEN OUR BLIND EYES, GET OUT FROM UNDER OPPRESSIVE DYNAMICS TO BE MORE THAN WE ARE TODAY AND TO FIND WAYS TO EXTEND OURSELVES FOR OTHERS.
- SERMON SONG: **WHAT YOU GIVE AWAY** BY VINCE GILL