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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

Luke 4:14-21

23 January 2022

Reading and Proclaiming

Opening Greeting and Prayer:

Please join me in prayer: My Lord and my God, you have inspired the words of scripture across centuries in the hearts and minds of your family members. We study these words in confidence that you are re-shaping our motives and our desires to align more fully with the life and way of Jesus. Fill us with your new life, your Holy Spirit, your very breath this morning as we listen to the words of not only this message, but our music and liturgy too. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Message:

Consistent spiritual disciplines or habits of spending time with God have always been difficult for me. I love to read and read about scripture. Sitting in God's presence and offering the concerns, needs, and praises of the community brings me hope and fresh energy. I have found that beyond bible study and prayer, we can experience the closeness of God and our neighbors through: having a cup of coffee and conversation together; exercising or working on a project together; sometimes just sitting in the presence of another person in silence. God visits us, forms us, fills us, and sends us out through so many different experiences. What are some of the ways, in which you felt God's presence and gracious power filling your life?

In Luke 4, we see Jesus entering the political, cultural, and social milieu of first-century Galilee as a teacher and anointed leader. Jesus is 30, and according to Luke, Jesus has lived

symbolically through the ancient Israelite story in preparation for this moment. Jesus joins in the exodus of repentance: those who leave behind the religious imposters of Jerusalem to join his relative John in the wilderness of Judea. As the ancient Israelites safely crossed the Red Sea and the Jordan River so many years ago, Jesus is baptized in the same waters of the Jordan River, passing through the water and being affirmed as God's beloved child just like the ancient Israelites were affirmed as God's covenant people at Mount Sinai. Then Jesus endures temptation in the wilderness for 40 days as the ancient Israelites did for 40 years in their journey toward the promised land. Jesus has come out of the wilderness to Galilee, anointed, affirmed, empowered, and emboldened. Unlike ancient Israel, who struggled with faithfulness, Jesus has become what the covenant people could not: a faithful and generous partner with God, bringing renewal and restoration to the whole world, light to the darkness, and blessing to all nations.

We should not be surprised then that in verses 14-15, Jesus is praised by everyone for his teaching among the villages and cities of Galilee. The Jewish people have been longing for many years for the Messiah, the great leader who would again establish the people and kingdom of Israel as it had been in their scriptures. Jesus seems to be that, but not everyone will appreciate the fresh word and witness that Jesus brings. Luke does not tell the story of Jesus changing water to wine, but we can still keep it in mind from our passage last week, realizing that as Jesus walks into the synagogue in Nazareth in verse 16, everyone has probably heard about what he did at the wedding in Cana. The excitement and anticipation must have been palpable as people arrived with their families at the synagogue. Maybe even people from nearby villages and towns had come to see what Jesus would do among the people who watched him grow up. If anyone would receive the miraculous blessing of this great teacher, surely those who had helped raise him and supported his family throughout his growing up.

When Jesus stands, the murmuring and conversation dissipates as all eyes in the synagogue focus on him. He walks to the attendant, who hands him the scroll of Isaiah. We do not know how long it takes for Jesus to find these words from Isaiah 58 and 61, but when he does, I can imagine the people inching toward the edge of their seats in anticipation. Can you imagine hearing these words: “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.” Jesus rolls up the scroll, hands it to the attendant, and sits down. They all had heard these verses before, but Jesus had stopped short of the final lines. Jesus had left out the most important part in their minds: “to proclaim the day of vengeance of our God.” As the people continue to wonder, Jesus begins to speak, “Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,” meaning that he is the messenger of salvation and liberation speaking in this prophetic text. But what about... and the people sit transfixed by his words.

Jesus has made it clear in this moment what his mission is and is not. Jesus has come to proclaim and live into the long-promised restoration of Israel, the release of its people from the sin and consequence of unending exile, and the realities of the year of Jubilee, described most clearly in Leviticus 25. Jesus is not here though to call an army to overthrow the Romans or to lead another violent revolt against the rulers of Galilee. Jesus has not come to enact the day of God’s vengeance on Israel’s enemies. Jesus has come; the Messiah is here to proclaim the truth of God’s redemption and renewal of God’s people and all of creation. Nothing will escape the all-encompassing love, grace, and compassion of God in Jesus. This new family, this in-breaking kingdom with Jesus at the helm will bring good news to the marginalized and oppressed, freedom to those in bondage or captivity, life to those surrounded by death and destruction.

Unlike the grand visions of military victory that his friends and family in Nazareth are expecting, Jesus is offering healing, hope, love, grace, sacrifice, and truth as the transformative tools or weapons of his ministry.

We will wait two weeks before we pick up this story again. Next week, we will join with Jesus and our neighbors at the communion table. Then the following Sunday, the first Sunday in February, we will step back into the story and explore how his friends, neighbors, and relatives respond. What I want to unpack this morning is Jesus' example of reading and proclaiming. Maybe you were connecting with my comments at the beginning of this message. Maybe you struggle with reading the bible, taking a few moments in prayer, talking to a friend about how your experience of faith is going, or even sharing with others the faith that you claim to be important to you. Sometimes, we read these stories about Jesus and excuse ourselves from what Jesus is calling us to as his followers because Jesus was perfect and knew the scriptures better than anyone, so we will never be able to do what Jesus did. We must realize though that Jesus had spent the first 30 years of his life preparing for this moment in Nazareth. Jesus's ministry is the culmination of years of study, prayer, and reflection like an athlete who puts in hours and hours and hours of practice into a particular sport or a musician who prepares a piece of music for a recital. We see these gifted individuals at their best, after they have invested so much of themselves into their craft. We don't know all of the different ways that Jesus has learned about the Jewish faith, but what he has learned has given him clarity and purpose for this moment.

As each of us daily follows in and lives into the way of Jesus, we carry on the mission that Jesus proclaimed in Nazareth. We speak those same words to our friends and neighbors, the good news of freedom and restoration for our world here and now. We read the scriptures and are formed by them. We then proclaim the truth and grace of Jesus to everyone. We invite our

friends, neighbors, and enemies to join us in the relational transformation of liberation and renewal. We share the hope that we have in Jesus as ones who have been released from captivity to pride, greed, and selfishness, knowing that the good news of Jesus changes us and our world. We read and proclaim the good news of a renewed family, centered in Jesus and open to all. With Jesus as our example, we live into these words just as relevant today as they were when Jesus read them in Nazareth: The Spirit of the Lord has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. God has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; Jesus has called us to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Closing Prayer:

Let us pray: God of freedom and new life, fill us with your Spirit, empower us to soak in your words of hope and proclaim them to those around us. Give us the strength to reach out and invite our neighbors into your family, a community of people seeking to live into the will and way of Jesus. Enliven our imaginations as we seek your kingdom here and now. In Jesus' name. Amen.