

## The Year of The Lord's Favor is Now

Pastor Molly Eversoll

01-23-22

Luke 4:14-21

<sup>14</sup>Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup>He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. <sup>16</sup>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, <sup>17</sup>and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: <sup>18</sup>"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, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

.....

Last week we discussed first impressions in the gospel of John when Jesus' ministry really gets going and today, we have jumped into another gospel, Luke. This is Luke's initial introduction to Jesus when Jesus begins his ministry.

It is a reminder to us that although there are 4 gospels and they share a lot of similarities and stories, the authors are different people, and they have different concerns.

Last week we discussed how the water into wine was to show that Jesus was pointing to the kingdom of God and the abundance of good things that the kingdom of God would hold when Jesus came to earth to bring it close. Water into wine was a sign of that abundant good news.

Luke's gospel isn't a story of a party, much the opposite, Jesus is in the temple teaching people and essentially giving a brief sermon that describes exactly who he is and what will be coming next in his ministry.

And his teaching centers around the words of the prophet Isaiah. Words that are exceptionally poignant: good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. While John is pointing to the symbol of the good news, Luke is literally listing the things that will be the good news.

Yet, what is similar to Luke and John is that we are going back in the communal knowledge of the people who are listening, who probably knew this verse from the book of Isaiah.

And while I think most of the list sounds really familiar and we get what they might look like and even can probably think of a few examples in Jesus' ministry, I thought what might not be in our communal knowledge is the backstory of this last piece of the list, the year of the Lord's favor.

The Year of the Lord's favor is such that it was an idea that during this year (once every 7 years) that slaves would be freed, debts would be forgiven, and there would be jubilation. It is often called the year of jubilee.

But here is the thing, it often was thought of in the future times, even the end times. It was never actualized in practice.

It seems to me like the community who first heard about it could never really get around to living it in their present moment. Either it felt like God was asking too much or it just wasn't convenient for them or frankly they just didn't want to do the tough stuff that actually made it happen.

Personally, I think the idea of a year of Jubilee sounds awesome but the implementation of all of the beautiful stuff that Jesus lists also sounds scary because those are heavy things, and I think as well, when we hear that list, we are kind of afraid that it will require a lot of us. Especially when we might already be feeling overwhelmed by life.

And I also think the people who were listening to Jesus felt that way too because they don't necessarily take this speech by Jesus well.

Spoiler alert, but next week pastor Andrew is going to have to take on an angry mob of listeners who get quite irate with Jesus and chase him out of town, but we won't get there yet.

But back to us, in the year 2022. We might think that this proposal and sermon by Jesus sounds really great on paper. But then we wonder, are we also supposed to make that happen?

But then we also might be sitting here thinking, Jesus I don't know if I've got what it takes to see that the oppressed going free, I don't see myself being released from the captivity of my own home let alone all the people who are really held captive by whatever it might be, I don't see the blind receiving sight, I don't hear the poor getting any good news, and that year of the Lord's favor, well it ain't now.

And what is more, Jesus, you said this was today (over 2,000 years ago), but I don't see it happening today.

Jesus rolls up the scroll he says today this has been fulfilled. Today. Not tomorrow or next month or next year or when things slow down or when we feel better or any of those excuses we use, but today. Wow, but also how?

A lot of our time over the past two years has been looking forward to a new time when Covid will be over, when everything will be good again. Two years later, we are still waiting for it. If we are really honest with ourselves, our minds are always thinking about the future and how things will be different instead of just being in the moment we are in right now and believing what Jesus says about all of those things being actualized today.

I heard this quote by Nadia Bolz Weber this week: "God is not to be found in eventualities, God is found in actual reality."

So, I gave myself a homework assignment for this week (on Tuesday when I began writing this sermon initially). I told myself that I would witness it, this week where Jesus was proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor and all that other good stuff, right now in my own life or in the life of the world, I was going to find a really beautiful example of it to share with you all.

Because I am going to be honest with you, with the Covid surge and Betty White dying, and just a bunch of other things, I was starting to lose faith in 2022 at about day 3.

And so Tuesday, I was going to see it happen, the year of the Lord's Favor, but what happened this week instead was a lot of chaos and stress and anxiety and the difficult decision of closing the church to in-person gatherings. The emotional stress and the disappointment that I knew you would all feel that desperately weighed heavy upon me and both your pastors.

So at about Thursday, witnessing to the Year of the Lord's Favor really wasn't looking so good. Where was there grace? Where was there forgiveness? Where was there release of the captives and freedom for the oppressed? I wasn't sure.

Here's my confession, I couldn't see it on my own, because as of Thursday afternoon, I was stressed and deeply afraid that you all would be so mad because of the tough decisions we were making.

I even began stress baking banana bread again and that banana bread had a lot of chocolate chips in it, something I haven't done since 2020. I couldn't will a good story or a good thing to happen on my own. It just didn't feel like it was coming.

And so today I am coming to this text and to you, not with a good news story to affirm that what Jesus says is true, but with a confession that is probably more honest than a quick story and one that I am guessing you might be feeling too:

Jesus it is hard for me to believe that in my own life, in the life of my community, and in the life of the world that what you say is true: all these things, sight, freedom, good news, and jubilee, it is hard for me to see that all of these things exist today and it is hard for me at times to believe you have already actualized them. Today, it is just hard.

And somehow, in this confession, here is where the freedom, release, sight, and forgiveness came. I released myself from needing to do the work of constantly hunting down something good, when I just didn't have the energy to do so.

And so I just let myself be on Friday and I realized that the quote by Nadia was true, "God is not to be found in eventualities, God is found in actual reality."

Because the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy that I was patiently waiting for this week wasn't going to happen in the future, it had already happened.

And I think that there are two ways I saw that It had already unfolded.

When I went back to the texts for this week and I read the second reading from 1 Corinthians it was all about community as the body of Christ.

And I looked back on this week, it was stressful and I was scared and anxious, but you know what when I was worried about all the Covid stuff, the body of Christ came together the staff, the Covid task force, council, they all made this tough decision together and in unity recognizing that we were trying our best to express our love for our neighbors, this community, and all those poor overwhelmed healthcare workers.

They affirmed the good news of Jesus that already existed, that Jesus had already made possible, had already been actualized.

And then, when I was stressed, I remembered some good news that Pastor Bre always tells me, she always says this, be gentle with yourself. And I think that the next few weeks as we practice caring for one another by slowing down the spread as the body of Christ we can also be gentle with ourselves and remember that Jesus' sermon was for us too and it is not happening in the future, it is happening in the right now.

So if today you aren't quite sure what the good news is or if you're struggling to hear it today. Know that that is okay. But remember that whether we can see it, the good news is much greater than a good news story. Jesus' fulfillment of the good news happened 2000 years ago and it still is here today, found in our actual reality.