

Sunday, January 26, 2025 ~ Luke 4:14-21

Jesus came out of the wilderness with a changed plan. Remember...Jesus, in getting baptized, had joined John the Baptist's political and religious revolution...John's movement against the political oppression of the Roman Empire, and the religious oppression of the religious elitists. And, between John's words and the Holy Spirit's affirmation, it is reasonable to assume that Jesus understood that he would be taking over the revolution. And, after His baptism, the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. Where He was tempted.

We cannot address today's reading apart from the preceding scripture. That is so often true that I frequently wonder about why the liturgical calendar slices and dices scripture into baby sized pieces. So... Here is the scripture preceding today's.

I think we are ourselves tempted when we read about the temptations of Jesus. I think we are tempted to think that these temptations are actually for the devil's benefit. That they are purely to show the devil that he has no power over Jesus. In other words, the temptation to us, is to make Jesus **above** temptation. I think that is why there is the temptation of the bread. Jesus was hungry. He had been fasting and He was really hungry. So that first temptation teaches us that those other two were also real temptations for Jesus. Jesus had joined John's movement. John expected a political revolution. Jesus had the chance to rule politically when the devil offered him the kingdoms of the world. But the Holy Spirit told Jesus "no", That's not the way this is going to work. That's not the way the scriptures will be fulfilled." Jesus followed the lead of the Spirit and so the next temptation was to throw himself off of a temple peak...because he would not be hurt. Jesus was being tempted to avoid dying. Jesus had to choose, during that

temptation, whether or not he was willing to die for the cause of liberation. Or maybe, whether or not he could believe that he would have to die. All this to say that Jesus, in the wilderness through the Holy Spirit came to understand His nature as Messiah. Out in the desert, Jesus' idea of the revolution was informed by the Holy Spirit.

so Jesus comes out of the wilderness and heads to the temple in his hometown. He stands up and he reads from Isaiah 61:1-2 sort of...because Jesus reads (READ). We must take very seriously that, after coming out of the wilderness with an inspired understanding of His role as messiah, Jesus stops reading halfway through verse 2. By leaving out the second half of verse 2 Jesus is teaching us something very important. Something made clear to Him by the Holy Spirit while He was out in the wilderness. There is simply no other way to explain such a strange omission. Because the part of the verse that Jesus leaves out reads "to proclaim the day of vengeance of our God". Jesus drops the vengeance part, the violent part, the retributive part.

This last Monday, we celebrated the life and work of the reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King once said, "You can't fight hate with hate, only love can conquer hate the way that only light can conquer darkness". That is the lesson of the desert, that is why Jesus stopped reading where he did. And today, maybe more than ever, we have to hear this message. Because oppression is on the rise. Oppression is on the move. The powers and authorities of this world seem to be hell bent on oppressing The human beings who are most vulnerable in our society: The poor who are trapped in systemic poverty, the sick who cannot access good health care, the transgender community whose rights are being gutted along with The LGBTQ community, veterans, foreigners...with sweeping strokes of

merciless power, the disenfranchised are being thrown to the wolves of greed and hatred and fear. All around us. Right now. Not to mention the earth herself. Powerful people are disemboweling the protections that have been put in place to prevent humanity from ravaging our planet. The ONLY time Jesus talks about eternity as a courtroom is in Matthew 25, the sheep and the goats parable. And the sheep were not separated from the goats because they had believed the right doctrines, or had followed codes of purity...rather, what separated who had behaved according to God's will from who hadn't was their treatment of the hungry, the foreigner, the sick, and the poor....So of course, we must imitate Jesus and preach liberation from all forms of oppression. But we must do so in love, not in hate. Like Jesus, we are not seeking vengeance but rather liberation. By fighting **for** the people who are being oppressed, we can concentrate on who we are working **for**, toward forwarding the kingdom of God on earth...what Jesus is describing in this scripture. We are **not** called to be obsessed with whom we are against. We are **not** called to Hurl insults at those we disagree with. In person or online. Until we let go of vengeance we cannot change anything fundamentally. If we act in hate we will simply become an oppressor of a different kind.

There is no doubt that God desires an end to oppression. The Torah, the prophets and the psalms are filled with instruction and admonishments about liberation from poverty and injustice. About welcoming strangers. And In the New Testament Jesus embodies this tradition of scripture by treating other human beings with dignity and Love. Human beings that society has cast out. Foreigners that were alienated. All brought into the fold of the good shepherd Jesus. When Jesus opened up to this scripture

at the beginning of his ministry, he was echoing the song his mother sang at the beginning of this gospel of Luke.

Just like Jesus, Mary begins by singing about liberation and ends by singing about mercy.

As we move forward in the world, may we be mindful of our inner stance. Our state of consciousness. That might mean Spending some time in the desert of brutally honest self-reflection, where we see what we are tempted to turn our mission into, to glorify our egos. We are not here to win arguments. As Brene Brown would say, "We are not here to be right, we are here to try to get it right". We are here to serve people. We are here to imitate Jesus by fighting hatred with love. By responding to fear with love. Hate cannot conquer hate. Vengeance cannot bring liberation.

Only love can bring the kingdom of God to earth. So yes, we must take a stand against the evil of oppression in all of its manifestations, we must use our voices to stand up against the unjust, unholy, inhumane treatment of our fellow human beings. but not from a moral high ground. After all, the mountains have been brought down and the valleys have been raised. We Are called to fight oppression the way Jesus did, loving one person at a time. Including everyone. Our neighbors, our friends, strangers and enemies. Because the only way to fight hate is with love.