



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, JANUARY 27, 2019
NEHEMIAH 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; PSALM 19; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31; LUKE 4:14-21

TODAY



Our younger daughter is scheduled to graduate from veterinary school this spring, but Kathy and I shared a chuckle this week, recalling her last day of Kindergarten, from her perch in her car seat on the ride home from the last day of school, she declared that she had decided she was going to be a grader. She hadn't yet fully grasped "r's" so what she

actually said was she was going to be a gwadewr.

We conjured up images of big yellow road equipment, moving dirt, with the six-year-old at the helm. No, she said, exasperated, she was going to be a gwadewr—you know, first grader, second grader, third grader.

Out of the mouths of babes...

Do you remember your first day of first grade, or second grade, or that of your children's? The ritual of first day energy—rising early, clothes chosen and ready, breakfast, the requisite photo of the first day of school...There was something special about that day—the first day of school, or later, the first day of work on a new job—there is something about that day that stands out from all the ones that went before, and no worries about the days yet to come. This is the day at hand, and it demanded our full attention. Today.

Jesus has just such a moment in the synagogue of his hometown. He's prepared for it, clothes laid out, breakfast eaten, he left his mother's house early. Today is the day. And he's fully present in the moment.

It's helpful to situate this passage in the context of what has led to this moment. He has grown up, a man now, he stepped into the waters of baptism, and then went on a forty-day retreat in the wilderness as he works through questions of meaning and purpose and identity. We are told he is filled with the power of the Spirit—he's charismatic, dynamic, provocative, and he's teaching all around Galilee, and folks are listening and liking what they hear. Word spreads about him.

Then he goes to his home synagogue where people know him. They've known him since he was a boy. He's chosen to be the *darshanim*, the reader of scripture, similar to our lectors who read from the bible here. It's a role he'd been in before, but this day is different, and people sense it in the way he reads, the way he walks to the scroll and back.

They watch him return to his seat, and they hold the space for him to comment on what he just read. I suspect many thought he might talk about the old days, the good times, before the current oppression, or maybe they thought he'd talk about some long-awaited day in the future when times would be better.

But he simply says, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Present moment...not last year, not some day yet to come. Today. Fulfillment today. Hope in the here and now. Yes, we can.

We will hear the rest of the story next week—how they are amazed by his statement, his charisma. He's just Joseph's boy. They actually turn on him and they run him out of town. It's too much for them to take in. (Come back next week to hear how it goes).

Jesus is inviting us to catch a glimpse of the prophet's vision—the good news from Isaiah when oppressed are free, captives released, the poor are offered good news, and all will know the present time as the year of the

Lord's favor. The jubilee. A time of rejoicing and reconciliation.

Today, he says, this is the day. Emboldened by the Spirit's presence, Jesus is speaking of the reign of God here and now, the present moment of divine justice that is always at hand, if we are willing and ready to step into it.

The truth is it's hard to live in the present moment, especially when the world is not right, when powers and principalities wreak havoc on the poor and the oppressed. Some cling to nostalgic memories of the past, while others orient in anxiety to an uncertain future. It's natural enough.

A recent survey of churchgoers in the U.S. tells the story—that a majority hold the opinion that our best days are behind us and the future is bleak. This is the case for liberal and conservative Christians alike—a prevailing nostalgia for the good old days, and distressing anxiety about the future, and together they consume a lot of energy, communally and individually. They also inhibits the important task of placing ourselves squarely in the sacred drama that has God acting in the present moment. Today.

For my part, I have a keen sense that the Spirit is moving in this place. It is palpable, and I've mentioned this to several of you in recent

months, and many have concurred with that assessment. The Spirit is up to something here and now, in our midst.

It's a dangerous proposition really, because we cannot control the Spirit. She blows where and how she wills, and there will be surprises along the way. The Spirit invites us to release our tight grip on nostalgic memories and our fretful fears, and open ourselves to the possibilities of God's reign right here, right now. We won't do it perfectly, not by a long shot, but this is our time. Today.

Watch for burning bushes, and mark the place as holy. Watch for Jesus, full of the Spirit, moving in our midst, taking his seat and saying, Today. Today. This is the moment for this community to act in accord with God's justice.

His friends got scared, and turned on him, tried to run him off a cliff even. In time he will hang from a cross because his message of fulfilling hope and justice in the moment was too hot for many to hold. Nostalgia and anxiety are potent diversions from the moment at hand, but Jesus calls our attention to another way, as one in our midst:

This Spirit of the Lord is upon you.

The Spirit has anointed you to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, sight to the blind, to let the

oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of jubilee to our broken hurting world.

Today, he says. Today. Take your places in the sacred drama of God's love, and be agents of God's healing reign. Today. Amen.ⁱ

ⁱReference

Some of the exegetical content here is drawn from a sermon by Diana Butler Bass http://day1.org/7044-the_power_of_today

Luke 4:14-21 [*Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. 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, 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 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."

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. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."]



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