

Jan 26, 2025

Pr. Steve

Texts: Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12: 18-31; Luke 4: 14-21

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

'When God returns, how will God come to us?' people asked Gandhi. And he said, 'As bread. When everyone is fed, heaven will arrive on Earth.'

'How will Buddha return when Buddha comes next?', Thich Nhat Hahn, the Vietnamese Zen master was asked. 'Buddha,' he said, 'will come as community.'

When Jesus was asked, he said, *'God is already coming in the vulnerable.'*

This text from Isaiah today ****[Isaiah 61: 1-2]** is the keynote of Jesus' ministry in which he makes clear that everything that he is about is—mercy and healing. Everything is about Mercy and Healing.

(And those of us who saw *'Conclave'* the other night know that's not quite always the case, is it?) How far removed we are from the heart and source of Jesus' life and ministry—because it's all about Mercy and Healing.

It is a stroke of genius that Luke places this at the very beginning of his Gospel—because the others [Matthew, Mark, John] don't. He's giving us a lens by which to see the life and work and ministry of Jesus, the whole Gospel through this lens of Mercy and Healing, which is also the mission of the Church. Frankly, it's the mission of every human being—because there's no life without it.

And the Gospel today is so straight ahead. [Luke 4: 14-21]; *'I have been anointed'*, Jesus says. (The word in Greek is *Christos*, which is where we get the word 'Christ'.) Jesus is the anointed one. Jesus is the Christ, who has been anointed to announce Good News to the afflicted, Good News for the poor—not just in Nicaragua and South Africa—Good News for the afflicted in this [San Ramon] Valley. Those broken down in body, mind, or spirit—Good News is coming to you.

Unfortunately, we live in a time where blaming victims—that's our strong suit, isn't it? *'We're never responsible.'* The highest echelons of power blame the victims. Not once has responsibility ever been claimed by that person, not once. *'California fires—your fault. What's wrong with Californians? Explain it to me. You people, you're so strange. Why are you burning yourselves up?'*

Maturity is acting responsibly for and with others. The only sign of maturity is responsible action, encouraging constructive life among people.

'I've been anointed to release the prisoners.' Like Leonard Peltier, 50 years in prison, an innocent man. (Decades ago, his own prosecuting attorneys told the judge that Peltier was innocent.) *'We're not going to release him, are we?'* 20 more years. And how many thousands more are there like that?

'I'm here to recover the sight of the blind.' He's speaking of the spiritually blind, of the ignorant, and the arrogant. Time and again in the Gospels, Jesus says, *'You who have eyes to see, look.'* [Matthew 13:15] I used to think that was mystical—not anymore. *'You who have ears to hear, listen.'* Listen. Wisdom. Pay attention.

'I've come to set the oppressed free.' It's the Exodus story, again and again, and again. And remember the heart of the Exodus is not just the Liberation—it is that life may flourish; that life may be blessed.

And he says, *'I'm anointed to initiate Jubilee.'* (This was a practice in Judaism which was to occur every 50 years. [Leviticus 25] We're not really sure how often it did get practiced, if ever. Because here's the criteria for Jubilee—and Jesus is saying, *'I'm initiating this again.'* Ready?)

One. Cancel all debts. *'You can't say that. You can't make money without debts, right? I'm asking The Economist.'* Cancel all debts.'

[Two] Return the land to the original people who had it in the tribes of Israel. (I guess that would mean indigenous people today, right? They should have some say about this, shouldn't they?)

[Three] Free the slaves, immigrants, refugees, others.

[Four] Let the land lie fallow so it can rest and recover its fertility, fecundity.

[Five] Free the prisoners. (Especially in Jesus' day that was the debtors' prisons, which were filled to overflowing.)

And Jesus says, *'This is who I am. This is what I'm about. This is the redistribution of wealth—and everyone on an equal footing.'* Oh OK. *'And we say, 'That that's not how the world works. You can't do that.'*

Friends, this is our work as people of faith. (*Who wants to sign up to cancel all the debts? I've got a committee; we'll start that right after Worship*) **Because this is how the world could work.**

I know, I know, I know. *'Preachers have to say that kind of thing, right?' Is that where we are—in that great stuck place? 'I like hearing about these things from a distance, but they certainly aren't going to permeate my life and our life. How could that possibly happen?'*

And what is it that generates the commitment and the dedication to do this? Well, the ancient Biblical quality that Bev [Harms] and I talked about this week is Hope. (And we think of Hope as going fishing, right?). *'God, I hope something good happens this week.'* That's not Hope.

Hope is a mother. Hope is a mother who doesn't need to pretend. Hope doesn't want to pretend that everything's going to be alright. Hope is a mother who looks at her child, who looks at a situation with that passion for the possible, because a real parent is going to do everything possible to create this space and the environment for that child to grow up, right? No matter what their vulnerabilities, what encourages them to grow into the dignity and the beauty of who they are?

Mothers see it; fathers see it [and] do everything possible to make it happen. Otherwise, you're a lousy parent. Is that fair? Because we all carry that, don't we? *'Hmm. That was pretty good. I was approaching 60 percent quality as a parent.'* Right? Nobody gets it perfect, but that's the challenge—to see the possibilities, and to commit for the well-being of the child, the person, the vulnerable—yeah, the victims who are getting blamed.

It's called getting down to business. Mercy and Healing. Let's get down to business!
Amen.

The peace, which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

****Isaiah 61: 1-2**

The spirit of the Lord Yahweh is on me,
for Yahweh has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring the news to the afflicted,
to soothe the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to captives,
release those in prison,
to proclaim a year of favor from Yahweh
and a day of vengeance for our God,
to comfort all who mourn,