

Text: Luke 4: 16-21

Sermon Title: Together in this time and place – there is good news and freedom.

Rev. Sharon Smith

Objectives:

- Jesus teaches good news and freedom
- Together, we are called to live out of an ethic of Jubilee
- The time is now; the place is here.

Introduction:

Together,
In this time and place,
we are invited into good news & freedom.

Last week, I received a phone call from a relative of a woman who had lived alone in Edgemont Village. Yet weekly she received visits from the members of this community. She was warmed by friendship, embraced by Christ-like love, and freed from lonely days.

St Catherine's was itemized in her will – this community has a history of announcing good news and bringing freedom.

A central message in the ministry of Jesus.

To make this clear,
The author of Luke rearranges the details of Jesus itinerary.

Jesus departs from the desert – where he was alone facing raw evil, facing the human desires of power, control and independence.

And then filled with the Spirit he makes his way home. To the region of Galilee, to Nazareth.

Luke's story has Jesus starting out alone.

Strange, because that's not quite what Matthew or Mark write:

They have Jesus preaching while gathering willing followers, a new one in each chapter – people who fish, who collect taxes, who are looking after parents.

The focus is on the formation of a community who become friends, later called disciples.

Luke starts Jesus off in Nazareth alone – announcing a big idea to his 'homies'.

Strange because the author of Luke also wrote the book of Acts... where community life is emphasised.

Acts begins with the departure of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit on all people.

And then a community of Christians gathers, sharing their wealth, selling their property to set poor people free.

Jesus at the beginning of Luke starts off, filled with the Holy Spirit, alone in his home town. Announcing a different way of life.

Luke positions Jesus as a prophet. A loner.
One who speaks out a different way of life.

A way that brings good news to all:

- especially those who live in poverty,
- to those who live with no voice
- to those who are hampered by government systems,
- to those who endure abuse
- to those who live with internal memories of misery & pain.

Jesus as prophet disrupts us to think beyond ourselves.

“Walter Brueggemann writes that the ministry of Jesus is **criticism** that leads to radical dismantling... Jesus’ message was to the poor, [and it was also] to those who kept them poor and those who benefitted from their poverty”

In The Prophetic Imagination

No wonder Jesus’ message meets resistance (we will read this gospel story next week. Jesus’ message disrupted everyone’s status quo.

I have been wondering all week, if Jesus, the anointed One, the human who best shows us the way of God, needed a **community around him** in order to live this different way.

Did Luke deliberately deviate from Matthew and Mark?

Is Luke contrasting doing things alone with the communal way (like in the book of Acts)?

I do wonder.

You see it is one thing, standing up and speaking forth prophetic words:
to announce good news & bring freedom!

It is quite another to do it together: to hear it, to let it settle it, to process it, yes even to argue about it, to experiment with it, and to work it out - together.
It is a communal process, one we as humans need.

We need each other. In the testing of ideas, and working out how to live faithful lives.

Southern Africans call this Ubuntu:

A value that states: “I am because we are”

My very being me is dependent on us being us.

My working out of my identity and my purpose – depends on us working out our identity and our purpose.

We are that intricately connected.

ArchBishop Desmond Tutu

A Nootka dialect* (indigenous people of the North East of Vancouver Island) calls this Namwayut – we are all one. Interdependant with each other and with the natural environment.
**a Kwakiutl word*

Together, we are being called to work out how we live our lives our faith, here and now.

Today after the service we will sit around tables discussing the future of this building. This space that has shaped and been shaped by the St Catherine’s community. For many of us this space holds deep memories and profound meanings.

It has shaped us, and we have shaped it.
This is not just a building. But it’s a building that actually has our writing on the walls. We have in a sense ‘written’ on it, or given words to it.
We got to shape it, and we get to shape it now. Freedom.
We got to create the meanings and we get to re-create its meaning. Freedom.

Sociologist Caroline Knowles says that ‘buildings are monuments to everyday life’ (p.58), and because life shifts little by little each day, the meaning of space is ever changing, in constant flux. She says there is an ‘active grammar’ in any physical structure.

Knowles, C. (2000b). Health and place

In our conversation, together, we get to test out new ways of seeing.
To listen to each other, to disagree with each other, to respect each other.
To work out what it means for this community to follow Christ and to live a different way.

This is good news & freedom.
The good news of togetherness (for loneliness is poverty),
and the freedom of re-imagining (for the past can hold us captive).

Jesus stood up. And deliberately read a passage from Isaiah.

The story pays particular attention to Jesus unrolling and rolling up the scroll. There was intention here.
Before we bound pages in books, the scriptures were written on parchment or vellum, rolled on two spindles, to find your place, a spindle was held in either hand, one hand unrolling and another rolling it back up.
We might say – he thumbed through the pages looking for a particular section of the Hebrew Bible. While everyone waited.

He reads sections of the prophet Isaiah chapter 58 and chapter 61.
And then Jesus announces:

Today, here and now, this is fulfilled.

Or in other words:

Today, here and now, is Jubilee (the year of the Lord’s favor).

The year of Jubilee has a particular meaning in the Hebrew scriptures. In the Torah (our books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy) it was legislated that every 7 years major debts were to be forgiven (all people, including those who had slipped into poverty through unfortunate circumstance were freed from owing money)

There was another law of Jubilee that said every 50 years land was to be returned to their original owners.

In an agricultural society land was economic, it was social, it was political, and for the people of Israel it was spiritual. They lived on land that was originally equally distributed to each family line. These laws ensured that no one lived in extremes – ever-increasing wealth or poverty. So, if through physical disability, death of the breadwinner or some other catastrophe, land was lost, this was a way to ensure that every family had enough productive resources to function as dignified, participating members of the community. (Leviticus 25:10-24).

Ronald Sider : Rich Christians in an age of hunger

Now I am not suggesting that we need to have this law or that it would even work today!

However, the presuppositions on which this law rests, deserve our attention:

- Ultimately all land, all earth, belongs to Creator, God.
- We are stewards.
- God wills justice – where there is enough for everyone.

This land we are on – North of Ridgewood, for centuries was cared for and stewarded by Squamish and Tsleil-watuth peoples. This land is precious.

This land is, today, in our care. This land is precious.

- Ultimately this land belongs to Creator, God.
- We are stewards.
- God wills justice – enough for everyone.

How will we steward this land, justly?

Such that:

Together, we can honour our calling:
to announce good news & to bring freedom
In this time and in this place.

This community has been a place of good news and freedom for many of us.

It is where we are continually working out our journeys of faith.

Lynn Spence would you like to come forward and share your response to the question:

“What does it mean for you to live a life of faith?”