

JESUS' INAUGURAL ADDRESS
Sermon for 1-24-10
Scripture: Luke 4:14-21, 1 Cor. 12:12-31a

I was thinking of titling this sermon Jesus' Politics, and you all know that we are not suppose to talk politics in church, or ARE WE? If we go to the definition of politics as use of a strategy based on certain beliefs to gain power or influence, Jesus words in the Nazareth synagogue set out his beliefs and the actions needed to create God's Kingdom on earth. Today's reading in Luke is what could easily be called Jesus' inaugural address. This passage is at the very beginning of his ministry. He had been baptized by John and then was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days of struggling with the devil and his temptations. He then returned to Galilee and began to teach in the synagogues in the surrounding communities. He evidently was pretty impressive and well regarded. Now at this time in Luke, Jesus had not healed anyone, hadn't cast out any demons, had not multiplied the loaves and fish. All he had done was teach and that teaching according to Luke caused everyone to praise him. Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth and on the Sabbath he stood to read from the scroll. The passage that he read was from the book of Isaiah in the Hebrew Bible.

Let's look again at what Jesus read from the scroll in the synagogue on that day: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." Some translations include here also the brokenhearted. Anointing just means that the Spirit has equipped him.

What about the poor? Now and then the poor are those who economically do not have enough resources as well as being those on the margins of society, either physically, spiritually, or both. I see these poor as those that have been rejected for any reason.

The next sentence is, "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." I wonder if the captives might be those in refugee camps, political prisoners in Guantanamo, the young black men in our prisons today that would never have been there if they had been white and/or rich.

Interestingly these quotes from Isaiah 61 left out the line about "the day of vengeance of our God." Being a person that believes that Jesus is the Prince of Peace makes this omission important to me.

So these two sentences were the scripture Jesus read for the day. After reading them he rolled up the scroll and said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He may well have gone on a bit longer for his sermon. The text says all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. A longer sermon or not, Jesus has announced what is important to him, his mission statement so to speak, or his inaugural address. He let people know that he was special, that the Spirit of God was with him. As he went on to preach and teach, he certainly said many other things; however, I believe that the core of his teaching continued

to focus on opening the eyes of the blind and showing compassion to the poor and the outcasts. This was Jesus' political message, his campaign slogan if you will. I see it as the heart of the good news or the gospel. We could call this message "the politics of compassion" (Kate Huey). Jesus cared and wants us to care for the least of these (Mt 25). In an age of individualism it's much easier to look at the thousand points of light lifted up by Pres. Bush--each of us doing our own thing to better the world instead of the community (country, town, church) coming together to re-order priorities and change the system to meet the needs of all of God's children. And this needs to happen not just in crisis time but also in ordinary times. Compassion means feeling with another, right next to them, not from above or below, but right along side as I hope Jami and Jonathan can feel as we offer them our deepest prayers and love as they deal with their horrendous fire that wiped out Jon's artist studio, his tools, and so many of his precious works.

Paul in our Epistle reading talks about the community of Christians as One Body, and I believe that God would want us to include all faiths and even those who do not have religious beliefs. In the early churches, there were already people thinking that they were better than others with more important gifts—so soon after Jesus went around dismantling boundaries and hierarchies. The apostle Paul called them back together with his famous metaphor of the body, saying that all the members of the body, though many, are one body for we were all baptized in One Spirit, erasing

the differences between Jews or Greeks, slaves or free. Paul says that when one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (v. 26). He then goes on to list various gifts of the individual members, a subject he had discussed earlier in Chpt 12 and points out how all gifts are needed. The new hymn we are going to sing after the sermon has the refrain: "Many gifts, one spirit, one love known in many ways. In our difference is blessing, from diversity we praise one Giver, one Word, one Spirit, one God known in many ways...." At the very end of chapter 12, Paul says "Strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way." Paul then begins the great chapter on Love, heard often at weddings yet intended not for romantic couples but advice for the way to treat each other, all the members in the community. It's probably an excellent reading with which to begin our Annual Meeting and every gathering together of God's people. The love Paul talks about is really the compassion that is the heart of Jesus' message, his Mission statement for his ministry. The short version of our Mission statement—or maybe we refer to it as our slogan is pretty close to that of Jesus' mission statement.. Look on the front of your bulletin: Love God; Love your neighbor, Seek Justice, Peace and Diversity. We might ask our selves as we go to the Annual Meeting how are we doing with this slogan? As you listen to the reports of the various officers and committees, how do they reflect Jesus' message? Does it look as if the Spirit of the Lord is upon us here at DCC? Are we visiting the prisoners and working towards the release of the

captives? Are we healing the brokenhearted? Do the works of our committees bring good news to the poor, the rejected? Do we work on restoring sight, not just physical sight, but understanding and insight into our work in the world? Are we willing to tell the truth even if it is not popular?

In closing I share with you the end of an essay by Sara Miles on our gospel passage: "Revealed or hidden, prophesied or remembered, God is always at work. Join in, come closer, lend a hand, and you will enter the perpetual present tense of Emmauel, God-with-us. Of holiness in mortal flesh, God alive despite our poverty and blindness, filling our clumsy, broken lives, making everything new. Today...!" My prayer is that all of us here will join together to make a more beautiful and compassionate world of justice and peace, striving for the greater gift of love. If we do, the scripture that Jesus made the Heart of the Gospel will indeed be fulfilled this day and in this place. Let's pray for God's grace and hold each other to our mission! Amen and amen