

SFBC

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Living a Public Theology

Luke 4:14-21 Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. Entering the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was his habit, Jesus stood up to do the reading. When the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him, he unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

“The Spirit of our God is upon me;
because the Most High has anointed me
to bring Good News to the poor.
God has sent me to proclaim liberty to those who are held captive, recovery
of sight to the blind,
and release to those who are in prison -
to proclaim the year of our God’s favor.”

Rolling up the scroll, Jesus gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he said to them, “Today, in your hearing, this scripture passage is fulfilled.” All who were present spoke favorably of him; they marveled at the eloquence of the words on Jesus’ lips. They said, “Surely this isn’t Mary and Joseph’s son!”—
Inclusive Bible

This weekend we honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. an extraordinary preacher, intellectual, writer, activist, and civil rights champion. In many circles Dr. King is known as America’s greatest prophet. This weekend we honor a man who risked his life and ultimately gave his life because he was willing to speak truth to power. He was willing to take his theology public. He was willing to walk the talk and take his faith to the streets. We are a better country because of the work of Dr. King, yet we have so far to go before racial justice and economic equality are realized. It isn’t enough just to preach about God’s amazing grace and sing Holy, Holy Holy, during Sunday morning worship and then do nothing Monday through Saturday.

We must take our faith public and boldly live our theology of justice and love.

This year we also recognize the quad-centennial of the first Africans brought to this country at Jamestown, Virginia. They first came as indentured servants. Yet, once the value of their labor was recognized, most likely in tobacco fields, the indentured labor agreement turned into the immoral institution of slavery. The year was 1619, a year before the pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock. And, here it is 400 years later and America's original sin of racism still plagues us and haunts us—even in the church.

Yet, as we seek to discern this morning what does the Lord require of us—but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God, there is a word from the Lord. Jesus said,

“The Spirit of our God is upon me;
because the Most High has anointed me
to bring Good News to the poor.

Jesus began his ministry in familiar territory, in his home region of Galilee. Filled with power from God, Jesus stepped out in faith to do the work he was sent to do. He went to the synagogue—to his faith community and proclaimed that God had anointed him to bring **Good News** to the poor.

So what could be so controversial about bringing good news to the poor? Well, nothing if one is using empty meaningless words meant to placate and pacify. If

we say to the poor, *God loves you*, and then move on to the next thing on the to do list, there is nothing hard about that.

God loves you. Got to go pick up the dry cleaning and stop by Whole Foods on the way home.

Oh you poor thing, God loves you. Well, I'm off to the movies.

No, there is nothing hard nor prophetic about that. But, if we are serious about bringing a prophetic word of hope to the poor, that will land us in a heap of trouble.

To bring good news to the poor means naming economic injustice and being bold enough to say that a few people have **way more** than they need while a whole bunch of people have **way less** than they need to live with dignity. To bring good news to the poor is to challenge systems that keep poor people poor, and children of color failing in our public schools, and poor people chronically ill.

To bring good news to the poor mean we will **really** do something about homelessness in the Puget Sound area instead of just moving tents and campers from one vacant lot to the next. To preach good news to the poor is to remind the poor that God sees your condition, stands with you, and is on your side.

Yes, preaching good news to the poor can cost you. Dr. King was killed while in Memphis advocating for the economic rights of sanitation workers, also known as garbage collectors. It cost him his life. While we might want to privatize our faith for safety sake, that is not what Jesus did nor advocated. There is a direct

connection between having faith in God and living out that faith. Faith in a box used only on Sundays at 11 AM is no faith at all.

For many pastors preaching good news to the poor is risky business. Some church members will dangle their financial support as a way to manipulate God's preached word from the pulpit. (Not here at SFBC) So yes, preaching a prophetic word to the poor will get us in trouble. It got Jesus in trouble. The late Dr. Samuel McKinney used to say that what got Jesus in trouble with the religious authorities was not saying consider the lilies and how they grow, but when he said, consider the thieves and how they steal. The hometown people/ church folks said, who does he think he is? Isn't that Mary and Joseph's boy?

But when the Spirit of our God is upon us, in the pulpit and in the pews, (for you too are called to share good news of hope and transformation) when the Spirit is upon us, we are compelled to preach a good word that spurs us to action. And when that prophetic word falls on fertile soil, it will also unleash financial generosity and provide those with means an opportunity to share in the work of the Spirit.

So what else can happen when the Spirit is upon us? Well, Jesus said, God has sent me to proclaim liberty to those who are held captive, recovery of sight to the blind, and release to those who are in prison.

In other words, we are to proclaim freedom from all that holds God's people captive. In our day and time, it is easy to see that all captivity is not behind iron

bars. Fear holds many of **us** captive and we walk the streets everyday. (Say amen for your neighbor.)

Fear causes us to make unhealthy choices and unwise decisions. We wrestle with fear of being alone, fear of being outed as being lgbtq, yes that is still a fear. There is fear of not having enough money, fear of losing a job, fear of dying. And yes we even fear ending a bad relationship. All these fears hold us captive, and make us blind to God's possibilities for our lives. So, we are called to proclaim freedom to those held captive and release to those in prison.

A fear that is ripping apart our country today is fear of immigrants of color. The real fear is that immigrants of color will eventually gain citizenship and vote. The fear of loosing political power has caused a political stalemate in Washington DC. And let me say, I was none too happy about having to travel on my job last week knowing unpaid TSA workers and unpaid air traffic controllers were distracted—worrying about how to pay the rent, put food on the table, pay for childcare, and medical. I know most were distracted because the average amount Americans have in savings is \$400.

It is unfair that federal employees are being held hostage to a dysfunctional political system and supersized egos. It is immoral to have people work everyday and not get paid. And it is just as wrong that those who have jobs and want to work, are prevented from doing so. If you treat people right, you do not have to worry about how they will vote! If you treat people right you don't need a 30 foot

wall across the southern boarder that will not keep out criminals and illegal drugs anyway!

We are being called today to proclaim release to those in prisoned by bars and those held captive by fear—even those who fear of people of color.

So what else is the Spirit saying today? We are to proclaim the year of our God's favor. This is the year of action, not tomorrow, not next year, but today. Now is the time. Whenever we sing the song, ***We Shall Overcome***, I want to sing we shall overcome today not someday. Someday is someone else's job. Overcoming today means I have work to do to make it happen.

In a few minutes we will have our annual church meeting. We will look at how we closed out 2018 and move forward into this new season with hope, love, power and passion. As a congregation, we must discern our ministry and our witness for 2019. How will we make a difference in the lives of those who live in this Capitol Hill community—the Capitol Hill community of 2019 not the Capitol Hill community of 1980 nor the year 2000, but today? We must speak words of freedom and create ministries that liberate for today's concerns and needs.

The Spirit of our God is upon us because God has anointed and appointed us to bring Good News to the poor in this community. God is sending us to proclaim liberty to those who are held captive by their own fears and prejudices. While we are ministering to those around us, we may have some internal issues of bigotry, racism, transphobia, classism and ageism that we have to wrestle with as a faith community. We are a progressive community

yet the liberations we may need to work on *first* could be our own. We may need to get free from *what used to be*, in order to receive our blessings for today and for tomorrow. We are to preach recovery of sight to those blinded by ignorance and intolerance even when it is our own ignorance.

This is the year of God's favor and I know we are committed to living our faith and theology outside these gothic walls. We must partner with God to bring life where there is despair. Joy where there is sadness. Hope where there is discouragement. Healing where there is brokenness. We can do this. In 2019 we will live out our faith so all of Capitol Hill/ Seattle/ WA/ USA will know we are a people of justice called to serve this present age.