

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

Brentwood Presbyterian Church
Mar 23, 2014

The Focus of the Public Ministry

Luke 4:18-19 & Psalm 95
(585, 661, 712, 717)

We've looked at this text before
in this series on getting to know Jesus better.
Back on Jan 19, we considered
how this text illuminated the prophetic tradition in Judaism
that played such a major role in shaping Jesus' attitudes and behaviours.

Then, we looked back into the influences that formed Jesus.
Now, we're going to look forward
to the ways Jesus actually lived out those influences,
to the ways in which he witnessed to God's loving grace
in his own day and age.

And here's an important thing to remember
in relationship to our Christian discipleship.
Like Jesus, we are called and equipped by the Holy Spirit
to learn how God has been graceful and forgiving to all
in order to realize the aspirations and goals of the Commonwealth of God,
then find ways to participate in that grace and forgiveness
in our own day and age
so we become greater and greater blessings
to all we encounter.

That's what the Christian life is all about –
listening for what God has done and is doing to help the world flourish,
then **questioning** how we can best collaborate in that work and witness,
then actually **trying out** the best collaborations we can imagine.

Then the whole process continues.
As we are **trying out** the best collaborations we can imagine,
we **listen** for further insights into what God has done and is doing
to help the world flourish,
then **question** how we can best collaborate further in that,
then **try out** that possibility.

When we **listen** to this text afresh,
hearing it as a manifesto or strategy for Jesus' public ministry,
several things stand out.

First, Jesus is aware of his anointing by the Holy Spirit,
of the intimacy he enjoys with God in the work and witness he is being called to do.
It is this close, collaborative relationship with God
that gives him the wisdom and courage
to pursue his mission and ministries
with the focus and resilience we see in his life.

Now, here's how Christians have understood the connection
between Jesus' intimacy with God and ours.
It revolves around Paul's idea of being 'in Christ.'
Because of the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf,
God's grace is available to all human beings,
every one.

They have but to accept that invitation
to consent to live in an open and flourishing relationship
with God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit,
in order to fully access the life-nourishing energy of that grace.
When we do, the anointing Jesus enjoyed is ours.
We are incorporated into the Body of Christ
and consciously collaborate with him
in the mission of God's Commonwealth in the world.

So, and second, our text goes on to specify
the kinds of things involved in that collaboration,
the kinds of issues we pay attention to
when we are living in intimacy with God.

This mission and ministry into which we are anointed with Jesus
is not about comfort and complacency.
It is about working with the poor, the captives,
the blind, and the oppressed.
It is about proclaiming to them the time of the Lord's favour.

The 'time of the Lord's favour' is the Jubilee
mandated in Leviticus 25.
It focuses on the forgiveness of debt
and the freeing of slaves.
It is about the restoration of equity and equality
in the sharing of the resources of the community
that God has given to all for their flourishing.
Hoarding things and exploiting people
is not an acceptable part of this commonwealth.

So, and third, the question is text confronts us with this morning is,
“How do we collaborate in vision of the Lord’s favour in our time and place?”

Who are the poor and what is good news to them?
Who are the captives and what does release mean to them?
Who are the blind and how can they recover their sight?
Who are the oppressed and how can they be freed?
And how do we contribute to all of these works of God?

The first thing to realize is that we are all of those people.
We all suffer from our own forms
of poverty, captivity, blindness, and oppression.
It might be physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual,
probably some complex combination of all four
dimensions of our human existence.

When we consent to God’s anointing, to his invitation into intimacy,
we hear the good news, are released, recover, and are freed.
We know what being nourished to flourish
by the grace of Jesus Christ means.
We have much more to learn about that,
but we have experienced the Lord’s favour in a vitalizing way.

Then we can more consciously model and invite others
to share in this quality of life.
That is what Christian witness really does.
It invites people to live in the Lord’s favour.

I’m not going to go into any further detail at this point
on my answers to those questions about who and what.
First, I leave it to you and the Spirit
to figure out the answers for your life and faith,
for your work and witness.
But I do encourage you to give it some serious thought.
Second, we will discover much greater detail
regarding these questions
as we continue getting to know Jesus, the Christ, together throughout 2014.

For this morning, let’s rest in the assurance
that God wants to be intimate with us
and be energized by the realization
that in that intimacy we flourish in every way imaginable.