

First Trinity Lutheran
January 27, 2013
Luke 4: 14-21

Sharing our Hopes

Our lives are full of words and some words matter more than others. The words we use to invite someone on a first date for example, are words chosen very carefully as are the words we use on a job interview. The words we used to apologize matter much more than the words we use when are arguing with someone. The words we use to say goodbye to a loved one for the last time in contrast with the thousands of other goodbyes we say are words that matter.

In this week's Gospel reading, we are treated to words that matter. These are not the last words, but first the first words – at least the first Luke records of Jesus as he begins his ministry. In a sense, this is Jesus' inaugural address. Just this past Monday some of you heard President Obama's inaugural address live, others of us watched it on television or radio, or read it later this past week. This is President Obama's second term but for first term presidents the inaugural address is the first publically spoken words of a new president. Despite what some say I think inaugural addresses are important. President Obama used his address to announce the priorities of his second term. But of course it's more than priorities, it's also a vision, a vision for what this country can and should be. A century and a half earlier, President Abraham Lincoln used his second inaugural address to do something no President had ever done before – speak critical of the nation. Lincoln named slavery as evil and how it took its toll in human flesh and he emphasized the need to win and end the war and support the cause of freedom for the slaves.

So in this cold day in January we hear Jesus' inaugural address. What kind of vision do we hear in Jesus' address? It is an announcement of his mission. It is a

promise of God's aid and presence. And all of this and more is summarized by the words *good news*: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. 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." Wow, we could all say Amen to that.

What is striking, if you listen closely, is that this good news is only good if you are willing to admit what is hard in your life, what is lacking, what has been most difficult. Or you might think it does not really apply to me because I am not poor, I am not blind, and am not a prisoner, and I am not oppressed. Therefore it is not good news for me. Do you see what I mean? God offers words of comfort, but such words only mean something to those living with discomfort. The question is how do you hear those words today? We spend a good deal of time acting as if we have it all together. We spend a lot of time and money trying to look better, get fitter, and look younger. There is so much pressure on us externally from the culture, and internally from ourselves, that we be self-sufficient and that we do not need any help, and this is why Jesus message does not have any value among many today.

Except for one thing: the stories we tell ourselves about being perfect, the commercials we pay attention to telling us that we really can have it all, the ads that promise us that if we just purchase this product or that product we'll never feel insecure again – these are all false. And deep down we know it.

So while Jesus' message is good news, in order for us to hear it that way it must first strike us as bad news, the bad news that that we are not who we want to be, can be, and should be...and we never will be. Jesus comes bringing good news to those in need, and to those who don't see, and to those who can't admit their need, and to those who want nothing to do with him. And when we can admit that need, when we can be honest

about our deep hurts, fears, and longings, three things happen. First, we feel an immense freedom simply by admitting the truth. Bad news – when it’s true – is still better than living a lie. Second, we can receive the help and comfort that God offers – release, sight, healing, freedom, and more. Third, the help and comfort we receive is not just for me or you but we are invited to offer it to others. We are invited, that is, not just to hear and receive good news, but to *be* it, to live it.

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians talks of being the body of Christ to others. And each member of the body has a specific purpose and function and each member cannot function without the other parts. Paul says for example if the whole body was an eye where would the hearing be. He used this example to make his point that all parts work together for the good of the whole. This, in a sense, is what the Body of Christ and community of faith is – God’s hands delivering the promise of good news to all who come in need. Afraid? Come here to find courage. Lonely? Come join our community. Ill? Come here – or better, let us come to you – to care for you. Isolated? We will visit you. Discouraged? Let us gather together and encourage one another.

So now we have heard Jesus’s inaugural address and what his mission in this world was going to be, the question is how do you hear Jesus’ words addressing us, calling us, inviting us to be the Body of Christ living out and extending God’s good news to all those we meet? Today after church we will have our Annual Congregational meeting. The church council has come up with some actions, we call them initiatives, actions that we want to do this year, but I would like to hear from you. I am going to ask you to write down one dream or hope for the congregation this year and one way in which we could make that dream a reality. There are index cards in the pews and then when you are done pass it to the center so that I can collect them. After I collect them I want to close with prayer.

Gracious and Loving God today you have reminded us that you come not for the perfect but the imperfect, not for the healthy but for the ill, not for the righteous but unrighteous, not for the strong but for the weak. You have come for us! May we recognize and accept our weakness and turn to you for strength, for healing, and for purpose. Give us all the tools we need to be the true body of Christ and bring your healing not only to this community but to those outside our community who need healing as well. Finally, Lord whatever we do in your name we ask you to bless it and make it flourish. Amen