

Faith Stories from Scriptures
Historia de Fe en las Escrituras
LUKE 4:14-21

El santo evangelio según San Lucas Capítulo 4
¡Gloria a ti, oh Señor!

Y Jesús volvió en el poder del Espíritu a Galilea, y se difundió su fama por toda la tierra de alrededor.
Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.

Y enseñaba en las sinagogas de ellos, y era glorificado por todos.
He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

Vino a Nazaret, donde se había criado; y en el día de reposo entró en la sinagoga, conforme a su costumbre, y se levantó a leer.
When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom.

Y se le dio el libro del profeta Isaías; y habiendo abierto el libro, halló el lugar donde estaba escrito:
He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

El Espíritu del Señor está sobre mí,
Por cuento me ha ungido para dar buenas nuevas a los pobres;
Me ha enviado a sanar a los quebrantados de corazón;
A pregonar libertad a los cautivos,
Y vista a los ciegos;
A poner en libertad a los oprimidos;
A predicar el año agradable del Señor.

*"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."*

Y enrollando el libro, lo dio al ministro, y se sentó; y los ojos de todos en la sinagoga estaban fijos en él.
And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Y comenzó a decirles: Hoy se ha cumplido esta Escritura delante de vosotros.
Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

El evangelio del Señor.
¡Alabanza a ti, oh Cristo!

Prayer

Our sermon title is, Faith Stories from Scriptures.

Opening

One of the most recent contributions of the NC Synod to the ELCA is the Book of Faith initiative. One of the purposes of this initiative is to increase Bible literacy among Christian believers...yes through the lenses of our Lutheran heritage.

That the Christian Scriptures, the Bible, is a book of faith as different to a book of science, or a book of fiction, shouldn't be a surprise for believers. The Bible is God's revelation, God's word to us telling the story of God's love for all humankind. In that story, God becomes human in Jesus of Nazareth, then God's story becomes more fully comprehensive to all of us. In Jesus of Nazareth, through faith, we become inserted in God's love story.

Bible literacy and interpretation, like worship, prayer, and service, become central faith practices for all Christian believers. In Luke's narrative of Jesus' teaching in the synagogue of Nazareth, his hometown and to his fellow countryman, we can hear three stories, (1) the story of Jesus and the prophet Isaiah. (2) the story of Elijah and the widow of Sarepta, the story of Elisha and the Syrian army general Naaman. To make full sense of the section our lectionary assigns for this Sunday, the context following this section is very important...though a full exposition and ending of the story will be given by pastor Mark next Sunday.

I. Isaiah Scroll

(Direct quotation)

"The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) is one of the original seven Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in Qumran in 1947. It is the largest (734 cm) and best preserved of all the biblical scrolls, and the only one that is almost complete. The 54 columns contain all 66 chapters of the Hebrew version of the biblical Book of Isaiah. Dating from ca. 125 BCE, it is also one of the oldest of the Dead Sea Scrolls, some one thousand years older than the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible known to us before the scrolls' discovery." <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah>

II. Context: Jesus' teaching in the Synagogue of Nazareth.

In his ministry Jesus demonstrated knowledge of the Hebrew oral tradition and written sacred texts of the TANAK, the Christian Old Testament. The oral tradition was an interpretation and a short version of the written texts. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus used these two versions of the Hebrew sacred tradition.

The narrative of Jesus teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth is included in the three synoptic Gospels, Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Only Luke's Gospel describes the full scope of Jesus' teaching: the reading of the prophet Isaiah chapter 61, a rhetorical question to the listeners, an interpretation, and the listeners' response to Jesus' teachings. Three prophets are referenced in Jesus' speech: Isaiah, Elijah, and Elisha.

Isaiah 61:1-2b – A Lord’s Servant Song of Messianic Expectations

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
² to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,

Isaiah chapters 60-66, the Servant Songs, a post Babylonian exile composition, introduces Jewish messianic expectations of a new world of hope, peace, and justice, for all nations. In Jesus’ interpretation of Isaiah, God’s timing fulfilling Isaiah’s messianic prophesy has come, and that he was the fulfillment of that prophesy of universalist overtones.

Elijah - 1 Kings 17: 7-11 - The widow of Zarephath in Sidon

⁷ Sometime later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. ⁸ Then the word of the Lord came to him: ⁹ “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” ¹⁰ So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” ¹¹ As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.” (NRSV).

Elisha - 2 Kings 5: 1-5 – Naaman the Syrian (Army General) – Healed of leprosy

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy.^[1] ² Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife. ³ She said to her mistress, “If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”^[2] ⁴ So Naaman^[3] went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. ⁵ And the king of Aram said, “Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel.”

III. An Interpretation

After Jesus reading of the prophet Isaiah (chapter 61), Jesus’ fellow countryman seemed to be pleased, happy, reassured that God was bringing good news for them, Luke tells us how they responded: “all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.” Surely there was plenty of poor, captive, blind, and oppressed people eager to listen good news from God. The expression “the year of the Lord’s favor,” has an apocalyptic flavor that includes both good news and judgment for God’s people at once.

In this context, A question for Luke's narrative is, why did Jesus have to risk a different response by bringing oral stories of the prophets Isaiah and Elisha to his teaching moment at the synagogue of Nazareth? A possible answer is that we, all people like and want to hear good news from God "for us," if not exclusively for us, at least primarily to and for us." Jesus was challenging that human nature self-centered attitude.

Jesus was saying that the good news from God includes people they might not like, such as a widow from Zarephath in Sidon to whom the prophet Isaiah was sent by God. Sidon was a symbol of wickedness in Jewish circles.

Jesus was saying that the good news from God includes people they might not like, such as a Naaman, a Syrian army general to whom God healed from leprosy by the word the prophet Elisha. Syrians, Jewish neighbors since the VIII century BCE, had raided, attacked, and inflicted ongoing pain to Jewish people.

Jesus was saying that God does not always shows a preferential treatment for those who might consider themselves 'chosen people,' that God is free to show mercy and compassion to all people and even to heal and provide for those considered outsiders, "non-chosen" people.

It might be difficult for God's chosen ones to "share" not only the blessings, duties, and sometimes the suffering associated to that calling and status, but it has been proven that it is even more difficult to "share" a divinity we consider we own, and we want that divinity be always in "our side." What if we reverse roles and we become the "non-chosen" ones? Wouldn't be good news for us that God loves us, heals us, and frees all people? That God loves us, heals us, and makes us free?

IV. Conclusion

The responses of Jesus' fellow countryman to Jesus' interpretation of the three stories in the Scriptures are carefully contrasted by Luke the evangelist, a sudden shift from happiness to indignation (anger).

I wonder sometimes why Jesus told the stories of Elijah and Elisha in Nazareth. Reading from Isaiah, a message of good news, even identifying himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's 61 prophesy, brought happiness to his fellow countryman. My educated guess is that Jesus was aware of the danger of the radical nationalism overtones of the professed faith of some of his listeners in the synagogue, and he wanted to be sure the message of good news for all people he was proclaiming wasn't misappropriated nor misinterpreted.

We all respond in different ways to the stories of Scriptures, to God's word, and through those responses we might heal and nurture our relationship with God and with our neighbors. But we should first know those stories...including the stories of those people who are different to us, and all the stories of people included in the Scriptures.

Amen.

Rev. Alfredo M Oviedo (01/23/2022)