

Today God's Promises are Fulfilled

By: Meagan McLaughlin

January 23, 2022. “Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” If someone were to come here and say that to you, what would you think? Pastor Meagan preaches in her sermon today that the Spirit of God is upon us, anointing us to bring good news to those who need it most, and that this scripture has indeed been fulfilled among us.

Readings: [Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10](#), [Luke 4:14-21](#)

*** Transcript ***

When a president or a bishop is elected, or a CEO starts at a new company, or a professor is introducing a new class of students to the semester, their first words carry a lot of weight. It's a key opportunity to let everyone know what to expect, and what the vision is for the work they have been called to do together. While of course much more will be revealed over time, the power of that first speech or article — the inaugural address, if you will — cannot be underestimated.

In today's gospel, Luke presents Jesus' first words to his neighbors — his inaugural address — to those gathered in the synagogue in Nazareth, his hometown. And as such, it is well worth spending some time with what Jesus chose to share in the synagogue that day.

Much of what Jesus says he reads from the scroll. For Jesus, as a faithful Jewish man, the Hebrew scriptures were sacred, and of all the texts he knew and studied, he searched through the scroll he was handed from Isaiah and chose a certain passage starting with, “The Spirit has anointed me...” From the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus points to God, the Spirit who anoints and brings life to all of creation. The Spirit of God is embodied in Jesus as he stands in front of his neighbors, friends, and family, reading from those sacred scrolls.

As the scripture continues, Jesus reads of the promises of the Spirit who anointed him: good news, release, recovery of sight, freedom... for those who are poor, blind, captive, and oppressed, those who need it most.

And, even more significantly, Jesus tells them, “Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Not next week, not next year, today. In our reading from Nehemiah, Ezra was speaking to people who had lived through exile and the destruction of all that they knew, and they had barely returned to the ruins of their former community when they gathered to hear the reading of the law, which was itself a gift of their time in exile. The priests and scribes had spent their time of exile compiling and editing ancient stories and scrolls that had been handed down among the Hebrew people, and it was a gift of their reunion just to be together hearing those sacred scrolls. And when he had finished the reading of the Torah, Ezra gave the Israelites the same message Jesus gave those in the synagogue: today is the day of the Lord. Today is the day to celebrate the fulfillment of the promises of our God.

If someone were to come in this morning to this sanctuary, to our Zoom space, and say that, what would you think?

Today, Sunday, January 23, 2022, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. This morning, at the beginning of our third year of pandemic life, as we sit in our sanctuary wearing masks, and in our

living rooms on Zoom, or isolated due to exposure or infection, the scriptures have been fulfilled.

Today, at about 10am Central Standard Time on this Sunday morning, with the sin of racism still painfully evident, homelessness a reality, and voting rights, affordable housing, and even clean water inaccessible to many, in our own neighborhood, community, country, and across the world, God's promises are at hand.

Today, on this Third Sunday after Epiphany, almost a month after our celebration of Christ's coming into the world, with unusual storms brewing and weather patterns shifting and scientists warning that our earth has reached — or is reaching — a crisis point, today is the day to celebrate and claim God's presence in this world.

Today, as we look forward to our community's annual meeting next week, where we will celebrate what God has done among us in the last year, and look forward with hope to a future that in so many ways is unknown, the Spirit of God is anointing us.

Today, on this day of your life, with all of the joys and sorrows, illnesses and health, community and loneliness, healing and brokenness, as you may wonder, as Mr. Roger talked about, whether you are a head or heart or perhaps just the stomach, hungry, the Spirit is alive and God's promises are a reality.

What are you thinking? How are you feeling, as those words are proclaimed?

We have an idea how some of those listening to Jesus, and to Ezra many centuries before him, were feeling. Many of the Israelites, we are told, wept as the scrolls were read before the people, overcome by the grief of all that had been lost, and overwhelmed by sheer joy and relief of being together in community again, hearing the stories and the history and the promises of God read among them for everyone to hear.

In next Sunday's gospel the story of Jesus' inaugural address continues, as some of Jesus' neighbors press him to the edge of a nearby cliff and try to push him over, they were so desperate to silence a message that seemed to make absolutely no sense.

In the midst of all the reactions, protests, tears, joy, wondering, the promise of God persists, as it always does. Jesus, pushed to the edge of that cliff, simply walks through the crowd and on to continue sharing the good news. Nehemiah and Ezra assure the Israelites that among the rubble they see in front of them, with all of their grief and joy, today is indeed the day of God's favor.

So what are you thinking? What are you feeling? There is room for all of it, and all of us, with all of the gifts we heads and hearts and stomachs have to share. And through it, the Spirit of God is upon us, anointing us to bring good news to those who need it most. This day is holy to our God, and God's joy is our strength. Today, this scripture has been fulfilled among you, in your hearing.

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

2022, Christ Lutheran Church, Webster Groves, sermon, podcast, transcript, YouTube, video, Pastor Meagan McLaughlin, Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10, Luke 4:14-21