

January 24, 2016 3rd Sunday after Epiphany
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10. Psalm 19
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a, Luke 4:14-21

With ideas and quotes from Diana Butler Bass, Day 1, for Jan 24, 2016 (unnoted one on page 4 is also hers)

Using the words of our Psalm today, Psalm 19, please, join me in prayer: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Grace and peace, good news and release, to you, today, Beloved of Christ. Amen

In Jewish synagogues in ancient time, Sabbath ritual was clear:

It wasn't a rabbi who rose to read the scripture and comment, but instead it was a person known as a ***darshanim***, a preacher of sorts, a speaker, a "teller".

Men, take note, any male could volunteer or be asked to read, and then to speak. This could be your day! You'd be shown the place to begin the reading and then when done you'd comment, tying in the politics or religious issues, or ethical questions of the time.

That undoubtedly is how it happened when Jesus was the *darshanim* at his synagogue in Nazareth. He's the hometown boy-turned, oh how proud they are, curious about his adventures, and so proud. Just like every other Sabbath, the synagogue leader unrolled the Torah and pointed out the place and Jesus began to read, right where they'd left off the week before, from Isaiah:

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.

Diana Butler Bass, preaching on this text, invites us to consider what comes next:

He rolls up the Torah scroll, and they are all eyes: what will he say?

Will he comment on the Roman occupation? Or the oppressive way the empire has a thumb on...everything!

What will little Jesus say? They'd watched him grow, knew his folks.

What will he do? They'd come of age together as boys, kicking around dusty streets.

Will he talk nostalgically about Isaiah, Isaiah's vision of a promised land after his community suffered so?

Or will he point them ahead, how one day the poor will be lifted up? How the captives will finally be free?

The blind will see? **It's coming, he might say, it's coming.**

Instead, though, instead Jesus simply says: "**Today the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.**"

We've talked each of these last weeks about incarnation—here it is again: incarnation, in flesh, fulfillment.

Are you crazy, Jesus?! Their jaws have dropped open, their necks are beginning to burn, anger rising. He could have looked back and drawn on nostalgia. He could have pointed them ahead, offered hope.

But he didn't, and that's what has them boiling—by next week they'll be trying to chase him off a cliff. How can you ever, ever say that the Spirit of the Lord is here? Now? Right now, today? With you? That the poor hear good news, that the prisoners are being released, that the oppressed taste justice? What about the news? Politics tearing us apart? What about the racial tensions and huge disparity gaps, another report just this week? What about violence, rampant, and we're desensitized to the loss of human life, let alone creation? What about illness and mental health struggles and grief, so much, so much? Are you crazy, Jesus? You said Today. "Today the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Diana Butler Bass tells it straight: **"Today' is the most radical thing Jesus ever said."**

Diana Butler Bass speaks of a recent Public Religion Research survey—this is her field of study—"that the majority of churchgoers in the United States express high levels of both nostalgia and anxiety. By strong majorities, religious Americans...believe that 'our best days are behind us' and that the future of society is bleak." She goes on, "In particular, mainline congregations are caught between valorizing the good old days and a deepening sense of desolation that some promised future will never arrive."

TODAY scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

I'll say Diana's words again: **"Today' is the most radical thing Jesus ever said."**

The Spirit of God is at work, active, right here, right now, in flesh, embodied. God with us. Present. Today.

Maybe you've heard me reflect on how in each conversation I had with the Call Committee last winter and spring, I'd ask, "What you were looking for in a new pastor?"

They'd always struggle for words, but then talk about seeking someone to light a fire.

Truth is, that's really not something a pastor does alone, it's community work, Holy Spirit work—they knew it.

Fast forward some months: the Vision and Governance Board took a day-long of retreat in October.

We prayed, we talked about this readiness to light a fire, we looked over the Kairos study and our history, we talked about the yearnings in our community and the wider neighborhood, and we got out post it notes—not just a few, not just pale yellow, but hundreds, literally, bright, bold, and we filled up walls with ideas, and we organized and reorganized.

Our congregational president, Beth Kautz, and I had created an agenda for the retreat but we didn't know what would happen...we didn't know how ready we were, how the Spirit would show up.

But it felt like the Holy Spirit's leading when three working areas easily came together, three vision goals:

One about our wider community, the neighborhood, the University, and Lutheran Campus Ministry.

Another about deepening our worship and spiritual life.

Finally a third about revitalizing our ministry with children and youth.

Over-arching this, we named the bigger theme: Igniting Our Life Together, remembering the fire, and the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer calling us into community.

These goals pop up often, but we're also taking some specific Sundays to focus on them in worship.

Today we focus on that first one, about Connecting with the University and the Community, or more specifically (and this is in your bulletin), our goal to:

Engage the surrounding neighborhoods. Make our walls "porous", and to

Make University Lutheran Church of Hope a place where Lutheran Campus Ministry happens.

Today the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing: Today.

We have such a rich history in this neighborhood:

I hear stories about back when the homes were still owner occupied and the community life was so vital.

Back when young adults and really the whole world, seemed to flock to church, it's just what you did, it's where you met people, it was the heart of community for so many.

But the southeast neighborhood, and Dinkytown, and so much has changed and a bit of grief is real for many.

Hear again the heart of today's gospel: Today God's promise has been fulfilled in your hearing.

It's not about yesterday, not about tomorrow, but today, today the Spirit is showing up, fulfilled in Jesus' very body, and fulfilled now in the body of Christ, in our hands and feet, incarnate.

Which then means that together we're about these big, bold, active promises today:

How are we bringing good news to the poor right here in our neighborhood?

To Russ, the man who sometimes sleeps on our door step? Or to students strapped by student debt?

How are we proclaiming release to those held captive and recovery of sight to the blind?

To those who are imprisoned by the fear of failure, or narrow views of success, or abusive relationships?

How are we letting the oppressed go free? How are we encouraging safe and meaningful and substantive and brave conversations about the real dynamics of race and privilege?

How are we proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor? This means the Jubilee, the ultimate and very physical time of rest and forgiveness and new beginnings—how are we being a community that embodies Jubilee?

On Thursday evening a group of us from Hope, and a group from Grace University Lutheran Church, and a few from Lutheran Campus Ministry got together.

We talked about the sometimes-blurred lines between our respective ministries and Lutheran Campus Ministry, and the ways we really ALL do ministry, Lutheran ministry, in these neighborhoods, and on campus.

Remember how Venn Diagrams works? We made a Venn with three circles: one for Hope, one for Grace, one for Lutheran Campus Ministry and we filled in what we each do, and our assets that relate to the campus and neighborhood, and then we looked at where these cross over and what we do together.

For Hope we listed intergenerational worship on Sunday mornings, Welcome Back Students, parking, Dinkytown, fellowship meals, pastoral care, the recovery community, music and concerts, faculty, staff, grad students, undergrads, young adults who live in the neighborhood, forums and lectures, the Interfaith Campus Coalition, study space, care packages, the Men's Bible Study, Beer and Hymns, Race conversations, the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, Soup, financial support, Thanksgiving Worship, Pastor Kate preaching, use of space, Tim Schroeder our campus ministry liaison, surely there is more. Some of this we do on our own, some with Grace, some with Campus Ministry, some with both. Some we do well. Some we want to grow.

It was a fantastic, energizing conversation, and I think it reminded each of us of our assets, and it also reminded us of how creative and nimble the Holy Spirit can be. But that's another sermon.

Over here on this wall, we've got flames and the reminder that we are Igniting Our Life Together.

This week, and then two more times over the coming months we'll add post it notes to fill out these flames. Today, I invite you reflect on this vision goal of connecting with the university, neighborhood and community. Following Jesus' lead of doing this radical thing by focusing on TODAY,

I invite you to imagine two columns:

On one side jot down the gifts and attributes of our congregation as we relate to our neighborhood.

On the other side, list the gifts and attributes of the neighborhood and campus community.

Sometimes naming them helps us get creative in new ways:

Let me say it again: Two columns:

On one side jot down the gifts and attributes of our congregation as we relate to our neighborhood.

On the other side, list the gifts and attributes of the neighborhood and campus community.

There are post it notes on your bulletin. Extras are available, so are pens. Take your time and as we begin to sing the next hymn, come forward and add your ideas to the flames.

Today God's promise has been fulfilled in your hearing.

"What we need is here. Today." Amen