

Sermon  
Third Sunday in Epiphany  
January 23, 2022  
Pastor Morgan Gordy  
Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Cor 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21

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As a person from the Alabama and Mississippi Gulf Coast, these late January days are always full of memories of Mardi Gras with marching bands and masked revelers throwing beads and prizes off floats into the crowds along the route.

As a part of the crowd, I'd always try to catch the eye of the reveler on the float – to make a connection – to try to recognize who it was behind that mask [perhaps a relative] and hopefully encourage them to toss an extra bead or two my way - or a moon pie - a banana one.

Like folks who watch the show – the *Masked Singer* – where entertainers sing songs while wearing elaborate costumes and masks that hide their identities and panelists try to guess who they are by looking for clues, we look for clues, for signs of who someone is or will be.

On a serious note, in the chaos after a disaster, as we work to form a coordinated response, we look for clues, watch for local leaders who will rise up and take the reins for the recovery of their community.

Often it's the person you least expected...

Our Scriptures tell us they were waiting for the Messiah. They were looking for signs – signs foretold by the prophets of old. But no one could have imagined it would be an infant born in such a manner and to a family of such circumstance. One would image signs of royalty and power, certainly not a hometown boy from Nazareth. No one would imagine that the Messiah would come and teach a way of love and justice and peace and give up earthly power and die on a cross - for us - for the world.

Luke carries us through these signs – the revealing of God in his Gospel telling of Jesus the Christ.

Revealing is a theme in this Holy Season of Epiphany...

In this season, Gospel stories of epiphanies and signs point to Jesus - signs that reveal to us who Jesus is - the One upon whom the heavenly star would shine, the One who upon the heavens opened up and called him *My son the beloved*, the One who turned water into wine. Jesus.

And today's Gospel we hear about Jesus, early in his ministry, and as Luke points out, *he is filled with the Spirit*.

Jesus goes to the synagogue in his hometown as was his custom and they handed him the scroll to read from – the scroll of Isaiah and he opens it and he seeks out this passage and reads...

<sup>18</sup>“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
<sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Scripture tells us “he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.”<sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

*Jesus took the mask off...Revealed to us this day, in this time of epiphanies, the Living Word and the Promise of God come down and all that is promised is fulfilled..*

Imagine this fulfillment today...

Good news for the poor- today.

Release of the captives in the face of mass incarceration and the detention of adults and migrant children.

The blind seeing even those who cannot see afford the needed care.

Imagine the oppressed, free.

All people regardless of the hue of their skin treated with equal respect, and with no fear of discrimination in their daily lives, in their work places, in their treatment by law enforcement and the legal system, with equal access to the ballot box - truly free.

Siblings of differing genders and gender expressions treated with respect, and not fearing discrimination in their daily life – in their work life. Imagine the joy in that freedom!

What would it be like to hear and know that this is the year of God’s favor that good things are happening...that a joyful celebration is happening! NOW for ALL!

Imagine the dream the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, had – realized.

*Imagine what this Gospel means for the world, that this promise has been fulfilled, that God’s Anointed, the Christ has come.*

*This is what Jesus proclaimed that day.*

But how does good news for the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed impact those of us who are comfortable now, those of us who may like the way things are now, like with the status quo?

Could we tolerate letting the oppressed go free – when we stand so often in the place of the oppressor? Or benefit from their disadvantage?

Could we tolerate higher prices so that the poor could be paid a livable wages?

Or do we say, don't mess with this, Jesus, I like things just the way they are. And then double down to make sure things don't change, as if we don't recognize God present – the Christ in our midst, or ourselves as followers and keep looking for another less demanding Messiah.

We look for clues - clues for what God is up to. We look for signs that reveal to us God in the world and God's intention.

The most revealing sign is this: That the One who read from that scroll also suffered and died on a cross revealing a God of love - a God present and walking alongside those who suffer, in disaster, in adversity, in oppression. A God that walks this journey with us whatever comes our way. A God that forgives sinners. A God of second and third and infinite chances...

The Good News is that that Jesus died for those hometown folks listening to him read that passage and would later go on to reject him. Jesus died for you and me even in our sinfulness, for us all, because of he loves us.

Even in our brokenness – Jesus calls us to be his Body.

All of us are needed, all important, as we live out Jesus' call to bringing good news to the poor and freedom from oppression. We don't get to decide who makes up this body. The Spirit does.

As the Body of Christ, we reveal Jesus to others through our lives. How we live in relation to one another reveals to the world the love of Christ.

We are one body, as St. Paul writes, and we are all members of it. And in the beloved community when one suffers all suffer, when one rejoices, all rejoice. So the fulfillment announced this day is imprinted on each of us as we are drawn into the fullness of the Body of Christ.

God's favor was made evident in Jesus, the Living Word of God – come down. God's promise has been fulfilled so that all may be well and whole, that all people – no matter how much they

have in their wallet, no matter the color of their skin, the language they speak, who they love, or whether they have papers or not – that all people are beloved by God and these promises are for them! For all of us and all of Creation!

We know that injustice still exists, that suffering and oppression still holds fast. Yet this promise is sure! And we as the Body of Christ, are called to be a witness of this promise and part of this holy work - living it out and rejoicing in it!

When we hear how far short we fall of living God's promised jubilee of love, we may weep as did the people in the reading from Nehemiah. But today we are assured, just as the Spirit was with Jesus at that time, Jesus promises us that the Spirit is with us, guiding us, empowering us to live into our call as the Body of Christ.

Like the Spirit moved in Rev Dr. MLK Jr and the civil rights leaders who now walk with the saints of light, like the Spirit empowers front line health care workers in the face of Covid, and in advocates who place their lives on the line for systemic change – for voting rights so that all may have a chance at the promises of this land, like the Spirit moves in teachers who in face so many obstacles yet give space and encouragement to kindle hope and curiosity in their students so that they can have fullness of life, may the Spirit move us to live so that everyone enjoys life abundant!

Jesus promises us that the Spirit is with us. So on this day, let us turn to God present with us. Let us breathe in the Spirit of God - God who feeds us through the Living Word, feeds us with his very self in bread and wine, feeds us and forgives us and gives us the grace

To repent of what needs repenting,  
To change what needs to be changed,  
To love as God loves,  
and to share the Good News.

Let us go out proclaiming it with courage and joy and living it out through our lives - God's promise fulfilled and God's love manifest for all the world!

AMEN