



Fourth Sunday after Epiphany Sunday, February 3rd, 2019

God Language Incites: Jubilee Exacts a Violent Response



British troops take up positions on the Falls Rd, Belfast, Northern Ireland, July 4th, 1970 in the cultural, religious, political conflict that marred Northern Ireland for centuries

In this season after Epiphany we continue to think about Christian mission. Last week, we heard of Luke's summary of the what the mission of God is about: the proclamation of God's generosity (grace), expressed in social, economic and political terms: the Jubilee. What is crucial to remember is that for the Gospels, and for Luke in particular, mission is always about changing concrete reality. The Good News is never reduced to ideas or concepts, without accompanying tangible expression.

Today, we hear that such attempts at mission, like the Jubilee, will get "push-back". In the Gospel reading, Jesus angers those who had formerly but briefly, stated their approval. As the adage has it, "knowledge is power", and what Jesus does is to challenge, to contest, the construction of 'knowledge power' of the community from which he originally came. The response is aggression, as they refuse to entertain new insights about truth.

GATHERING

Welcome

In the name of God
 In the name of the Son
 In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with
And also with you

Let's Sing: Glorious things of you are spoken (TiS 446, Austria 772, John Newman)

Opening Prayers – On the Brow of the Hill (Luke 4:21-30)

Giving expression to what is called the “Missio Dei”, or Mission of God, through the lens of Jesus, has always been a difficult affair: in part because Jesus himself stood in contrast and conflict with the religious and state authorities of the day and, as well as at times with the crowds. A Christ who reflects a spirit of dissidence, asks us to think critically about the world and about the church. The question we are asked to consider through the story from Luke, is who would it be today, who would carry Jesus to the brow of the hill, to cast him over? The implication in the Gospel reading, is that it would in all likelihood be the Christians.

Nothing against you personally, Jesus,
this edge of town to which we've taken you,
this place from which to shove you —
 nothing against the way you spoke,
 the way you read from the scroll,
 (which wasn't bad for a carpenter's son)
 and nothing against the deeds we hear
 you've done in little Capernaum
 (which again is kind of surprising
 for one of Joseph's boys) — it's just
those things you said about
the old-time prophets caring for
foreigners
 ahead of our own people,
 your suggestion that God
 would have love for strangers
 that might come before love for us.
 That kind of talk, that kind of idea,

well, it just goes against our core.
 We're sure God's priorities
 are the ones we choose
 for taking care of ourselves.
 We're sure God's behind us in keeping
 our privileged place secure.

***So it's nothing against you personally,
 just those things you say
 that
 must never be allowed.***

Now if you would step a little closer
 to this cliff edge,
 let's not make this
 any messier than it really has to be.

Amen

The Peace

The Young People leave for SMG

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Sayings about God Language

What is repeated as God's words and interpreted as God's words
 require the speaker to take full responsibility for her or his
 interpretation. God language can cause powerful reactions, for good
 or for evil, even violence and death

Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*

Human beings function only within language. Therefore, we cannot
 escape to any dimension greater than language, but, on the other
 hand, we can accomplish virtually the best and the worst imaginable
 with language.

Ibid

It is only by listening to what we say about God (what has been said
 from many generations), and to how what is said about God ties in

with what we say and do in innumerable other connections, that we have any chance of understanding what we mean when we speak of God.” (pp 147-148)

Ibid

Jeremiah 1:4-19 (Good News Translation)

The ‘dialogue’ between God and Jeremiah in Jer 1:4-10 has distinct resonance with other call narratives, for example Isaiah (Isa 6:1-13) and further back, Moses (Exod 3:1-15). In each case the call takes place in a conversation and in each case the person called protests in some way – that they are too young, unclean or inarticulate. The passage describing Jeremiah’s ‘call’ to prophesy contains strong indications that he would be at odds with many of those to whom he will prophesy (v. 10). It will require courage in the performance of his prophetic duty, particularly when called on to speak to the leaders of nations (especially his own nation of Judah). His ‘outsider’ status will be reinforced by his strong criticism of other prophets (e.g. Jer 6:14) and leaders of the temple (7:1-5). His own prophetic word will cause great resentment, and he will spend much of his time outside the social world of his own people (16:8). We can’t help but note the similarities between Jeremiah’s experience and Luke’s story of Jesus’ reception in his hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:21-30).

⁴ The LORD said to me, ⁵ “I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born, I selected you to be a prophet to the nations.”

⁶ I answered, “Sovereign LORD, I don't know how to speak; I am too young.”

⁷ But the LORD said to me, “Do not say that you are too young, but go to the people I send you to, and tell them everything I command you to say. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I will be with you to protect you. I, the LORD, have spoken!”

⁹ Then the LORD reached out, touched my lips, and said to me, “Listen, I am giving you the words you must speak. ¹⁰ Today I give you authority over nations and kingdoms to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

1 Corinthians 13 (Good News Translation)

Joan Watson

This piece has a beauty all of its own, like an autumn leaf fallen from a tree. As such it has been loved and admired, not infrequently as a reading, for instance, at weddings. Much of its impact remains when it thus floats free. This makes it all the more interesting to consider it in its context in 1 Corinthians, where it stands not only as a fine piece of writing, but also as a very confronting statement. One of Paul’s concerns in the Corinthian community, is the priority they place upon spiritual gifts: in particular “tongues”. Many in the community, held to a victorious view of Christian identity, seeing themselves as already accomplished ‘citizens of heaven’, because they spoke

tongues: it was a means to power. In Paul's letter in general and in this section in particular, he attempts to foil the misreading of what the spiritual is all about, by countering the power of "tongues" with the powerlessness of public love.

13 I may be able to speak the languages of human beings and even of angels, but if I have no love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. ² I may have the gift of inspired preaching; I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets; I may have all the faith needed to move mountains—but if I have no love, I am nothing. ³ I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burned—but if I have no love, this does me no good.

⁴ Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; ⁵ love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; ⁶ love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. ⁷ Love never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail.

⁸ Love is eternal. There are inspired messages, but they are temporary; there are gifts of speaking in strange tongues, but they will cease; there is knowledge, but it will pass. ⁹ For our gifts of knowledge and of inspired messages are only partial; ¹⁰ but when what is perfect comes, then what is partial will disappear.

¹¹ When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that I am an adult, I have no more use for childish ways. ¹² What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face-to-face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete—as complete as God's knowledge of me.

¹³ Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Luke 4:21-30 (Good News Translation)

Lawrence Peak

Last week we had the first part of Jesus' appearance before his home synagogue (4:14-21). Now we read of the response. Now he invites us to reflect on what is about to happen. The initial response is awe (4:22). Already by the end of verse 22, the initially positive response is becoming something else: 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' Jesus had been spreading his wings in Capernaum according to 4:14-15, 23b, and doing some of the things that the borrowed mission statement from Isaiah 61 enumerated,

last week: acts that reflect the Jubilee. Now he is back home. Jesus himself, second-guesses what they are thinking: why won't he do for them the kind of miracles he did for Capernaum? People become possessive about truth and knowledge. When their knowledge power is threatened, they often become aggressive. This can include refusal to face new truth. It can include vilification of the other. Luke could have written similar things about Christian communities, had he known what we know about the history that followed. A different race, a different culture, a different setting - to those obsessed with protecting their own and fearful of change, these are dangers to be avoided, enemies to be attacked.

²¹ as he said to them, “This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.”

²² They were all well impressed with him and marvelled at the eloquent words that he spoke. They said, “Isn't he the son of Joseph?”

²³ He said to them, “I am sure that you will quote this proverb to me, ‘Doctor, heal yourself.’ You will also tell me to do here in my hometown the same things you heard were done in Capernaum. ²⁴ I tell you this,” Jesus added, “prophets are never welcomed in their hometown. ²⁵ Listen to me: it is true that there were many widows in Israel during the time of Elijah, when there was no rain for three and a half years and a severe famine spread throughout the whole land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to anyone in Israel, but only to a widow living in Zarephath in the territory of Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many people suffering from a dreaded skin disease who lived in Israel during the time of the prophet Elisha; yet not one of them was healed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”

²⁸ When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were filled with anger. ²⁹ They rose up, dragged Jesus out of town, and took him to the top of the hill on which their town was built. They meant to throw him over the cliff, ³⁰ but he walked through the middle of the crowd and went his way.

The Gospel of the Lord
Praise to you Lord Christ

Martin Luther King: The Power of God Language
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vP4iY1TtS3s>

Some thoughts...

Let's Give

Doxology

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

Prayer of Dedication**Sacrament of Holy Communion**

Hymn: Far beyond our mind's grasp (TiS 542, Caturrog Na Nonoy, Francisco F. Feliciano)

Invitation

This is the table of the Lord.

It is to be made ready for those who love him and who want to love him more.

So, come, you who have much faith and you who have little, you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time, you who have tried to follow and you who have failed.

It is our Lord who invites you.

It is his will that those who want him should meet him here.

The Story

Now let us hear the story of how this sacrament began.

On the night on which Jesus was betrayed, he sat at supper with his disciples. While they were eating, he took a piece of bread, said a blessing, broke it and gave it to them with the words, 'This is my body. It is broken for you. Do this to remember me.'

Later on he took a cup of wine, saying, 'This cup is God's new covenant, sealed, with my blood. Drink from it, all of you, to remember me.'

So now, following Jesus' example and command, we take this bread and this wine, the ordinary things of the world which Christ will make special. And as he said a prayer before sharing, let us do so too.

Prayer of Gratitude and Concern

Gratitude, praise, hearts lifted high,
voices full and joyful...these you deserve God.

For when we were nothing you made us something; When we had no name and no faith and no future.

You called us to be your children;
When we lost our way or turned away,
you did not abandon us;
When we came back to you,
your arms opened wide in welcome.
And look, you prepare a table for us
offering not just bread, not just wine,
but your very self
so that we may be filled, forgiven, healed, blessed, and made new again.
You are worth all our pain and all our praise.

So, we join our voices to those of the church on earth and in heaven
and say

(We sing)

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.***

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest

Lord God, as we come to share the richness of your table
we cannot forget the rawness of the earth.

We cannot take bread and forget those who are hungry.

Your world is one world and we are stewards of its nourishment.

Lord, put our prosperity at the service of the poorest of the earth

We cannot take wine and forget those who are thirsty. The ground
and the rootless, the earth and its weary people cry out for justice.

Lord, put our fullness at the service of the empty

We cannot hear your words of peace
and forget the world at war.

Or, if not at war, then preparing for it.

***Show us quickly, Lord, how to turn weapons into welcome signs
and the lust for power into a desire for peace***

We cannot celebrate the feast of your family and forget our divisions.
We are one in Spirit but not in fact; history and hurt still dismember us.

Lord, heal your church in every brokenness.

Prayer of Consecration

Lord Jesus Christ, present with us now,
for all that you have done and all that you have promised.
What have we to offer?

Our hands are empty,
our hearts are sometimes full of wrong things.
We are not fit to gather up the crumbs from under your table.
But with you is mercy
and the power to change us.

Send down your Holy Spirit on us
and on these gifts of bread and wine
that they may become for us your body,
healing, forgiving and making us whole;
so that we may become, for you, your body,
loving and caring in the world until your kingdom comes.

Amen.

Among friends, gathered round a table,
Jesus took bread, broke it and said,
“This is my body: it’s broken – for you.”

And later he took the cup of wine and said,
“This is the new relationship with God
made possible because of my death.
Take this – all of you.”

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.

O Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world, grant us your peace.

Look, look, here is your Lord coming to you in bread and wine. These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

Bread and wine are distributed among the people

We come forward as a family to partake of the elements together at the Communion Table. The cup on the right-hand side as you face the table is unfermented grape juice and the cup on the left-hand side is alcoholic wine.

Concluding Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have put your life in our hands, now we put our lives in yours.

Take us, shake us, remake us.

May we become as God-like as you are human

Amen

Prayers of the People

Lawrence Peak

The one who prays offers the following words at the end of each series of petitions, "May our prayers feed our actions". The people respond, "May our actions confirm our words".

Hymn: God is love (TiS 153, Abbot's Leigh, Timothy Rees)

Blessing

It is only by listening to what we say about God, and to how what is said, ties in with what we do, that Christian faith carries credibility

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Amen

We sing: Shalom to you now (TIS 778, Spanish melody, Elise Shoemaker Eslinger)

Closing Postlude Organist:

Jim Abraham

