

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time-C

Lk 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Today we begin a journey with the Good News presented by Luke. After the introduction, we hear Jesus lay out his plan of attack. He is going to confront evil and sin head on.

When Jesus was referring to deliverance from the consequences of sin, he used a great voice in the Jewish tradition, the prophet Isaiah. The people got it. He was talking about fulfilling the long-awaited promises of God. It was clearly the work of the Messiah. Jesus was tapping into the hunger rooted deep in the hearts of his townsfolk. This is a hunger in every human heart. He was proclaiming a new day, a day of liberation, a day of salvation.

For Jesus' immediate audience, the release of captives and prisoners did not mean early parole. It meant a release from sin and all its destructive results in their lives. Using the rich and expansive language of Isaiah, Jesus points to a liberation that embraced the whole person, body and soul, mind and spirit. The sin that Jesus will free people from goes far beyond personal guilt. It includes the deeply rooted expressions of evil in all human situations: the sexual abuse scandal in the Church, the gross disparity of income, sexual slavery, a divorce rate over fifty percent, growing rejection of faith, the steady exploitation of our environment, the long painful history of racism and so much more.

When Isaiah talks of sight to the blind, he penetrates deeper than the physical level. The text also means the sight of those who have been in that darkness of a tunnel –like captivity that bursts open into the bright sunshine of the day. There is no darkness like the darkness of the spirit.

In the phrase **“let the oppressed go free”** (Lk 4:18), Jesus proclaims a program of social justice for the poor that will be a prominent part of Luke's Gospel. Luke's description of salvation includes the social and economic expressions of reality.

There is a part of the Isaiah passage that Jesus does not quote. It is **“a day of vengeance of our God.”** (Isa 61: 2) By stressing the **“acceptable year of the Lord”**

(Isa 58:5), Jesus is entering deeply into the mystery of his mission. This acceptance is about the unconditional hospitality of God. Before all else, including the necessary conversion, all of us are the recipients of God's acceptance. God takes us into his love as we are.

Jesus' ministry will be one of acceptance. Judgment will come later. Jesus is on the mission to proclaim the hospitality of a merciful God. Jesus' action will manifest and declare the hospitable acceptance of God along with the release from all forms of captivity and blindness that make up the human condition.

People will be accepted, not judged, in the agenda of Jesus. The conversion will be necessary. However, even the possibility of conversion, is based on God's acceptance that Jesus sets out in today's Gospel. Jesus is inaugurating a program of the hospitality of God for all humankind.

His Gospel message will be in conflict with human efforts to limit the message of Good News to protect entrenched self-interests. We will encounter that conflict with next week's Gospel and the response of the people of Nazareth to God's universal hospitality.