

Nehemiah 8:1-10

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21

Sermon January 27th, 2019

Jesus Heals, Empowers, Liberates, and Restores

This past week was the week of Christian unity. Many churches from different denominations gathered together in Calgary to worship together. To hear the gospel together. The good news that tells us who Jesus is and what Jesus' ministry looks like.

Unfortunately, for most of us, this brief moment in the year is the only time we put our differences aside and gather together to hear the good news. For the majority of the year we seem to fight with one another over Jesus' words. Over the question: What is the gospel saying to us?

We interpret these words differently, and sometimes this leads to heated conversations and dialogue. Sometimes we disrespect one another during these dialogues or feel that the gap between our views is too far to bridge.

During the Reformation the Reformers including Martin Luther disagreed with the Pope and cardinals over contentious issues. The ways in which they argued with each other disrespectfully, and the fact that they felt there was too big a gap between some issues, lead to an eventual division between the Roman Catholics and the Reformers and their followers.

Recently, in our Lutheran churches, we have seen heated conversations over contentious issues, where unfortunate name calling, acts of disrespect, and major gaps in people's views, lead to severed relationships. Hurt feelings. Hearts broken. And eventual division, birthing new Lutheran churches.

Sometimes I feel we get so caught up in the differences we have over biblical and theological interpretations that we forget that the church is first and foremost about relationships.

As human beings we know that relationships have a huge impact on our lives. When we are in a healthy relationship with someone we feel inspired and motivated for life by this relationship. We feel empowered and loved. We feel energized. We feel supported and cared for.

When we are in a relationship that is hurting or broken with someone we feel the opposite: unmotivated and sad. Unloved and hurt. sluggish. Neglected. Lonely.

We are relational beings who need each other to have fulfilling lives. Who need each other to feel inspired to change the world for the better. Who need each other to feel inspired to imitate Christ in our lives.

For Luke, our gospel writer, he is dealing with similar issues. The church is split in different directions as they try to wrestle with Jesus' words. Try to wrestle with that question: What is the gospel saying to us?

So, he shares a story near the beginning of Jesus' ministry where Jesus goes around to the synagogues, reciting a scripture passage from Isaiah, that tells people what he has been sent here to do in point form. The Cole's notes version of Jesus' ministry.

First, the text says Jesus is here to give hope to those who live in poverty. Now, looking at Jesus' context he would have come across many people living in poverty in the villages in Galilee. So, this message resonates with many who Jesus encounters in this area.

If we look at many of the roots of poverty we see that often these people have lived through broken relationship after broken relationship. They have experienced people who have rejected them. Who have given up on them. Who have judged or labeled them. Who have stopped caring for them.

Sometimes I think when we hear Jesus talk about those who live in poverty that the good news he preaches is about just financially providing for their needs. But, I argue that his focus is more on healing the broken relationships in their lives. Helping them reconnect with the people in their families and communities.

The scripture goes on to say that Jesus will free the prisoners, heal the blind, and free the oppressed. Or in other words, get the prisoners connected to a community that will make a difference in their lives. Or help them reconcile or reconnect with the community who imprisoned them. Jesus will heal people from the ailments, which have led to their marginalization. Therefore, giving them a chance to reconnect with their communities. Jesus will challenge the leaders, the righteous to stop oppressing them. Giving them a chance to feel like a valued part of the community. We can see from Isaiah's words that Jesus' main purpose for us is to heal our broken relationships.

Even though it seems at times that Jesus is caught up in heated debates with the Pharisees over interpretations of scripture. Jesus' focus is more about mending relationships and building relationships. Breathing health and wholeness on communities.

For us, in our time where division and broken relationships seem to impact all of us we hope in Jesus' message as well. Maybe most of us here wouldn't define ourselves as poor. But, we all have been negatively impacted in some way by broken relationships. We all are in need of healing and restoration.

This is why Jesus comes. For all of us. So that first, our relationship with our creator is reconciled and healthy. And, second, our relationships with one another can experience healing and renewal. This is the hope of the gospel.

That we are freed from the oppression of loneliness, judgment, and rejection. That we are healed from the wounds that keep us from relationships with others. That we are no longer imprisoned in a life that is dictated by the broken relationships we live in. But we are liberated to live a life loving God and one another.

Paul in his dealings with the conflicts in the churches in Corinth opens people's hearts to see that everyone is unique in the body of Christ and has something valuable to offer to the ministry of Christ. When we can see each other as valuable children of God who deserve to be loved and respected then maybe our ears are opened to not only hear the gospel but listen to Jesus' words. Listen to each other. To help heal and reconcile relationships in our lives and the lives of others. To liberate instead of oppress.

Because when we take Jesus' words seriously this morning we all experience the healing and restoration Jesus has in store for us. Our relationships become life giving. Our churches work together so that all those in society that feel run down and rejected will experience new life in the gospel. The gospel that says we are all valued and loved by God.

Let us pray, loving God, sometimes life hurts. Sometimes we hurt each other. Help us to value one another. To love one another as you love us. Heal us from our broken relationships and restore us to new life where we can spread a message that is life giving and liberating. Healing and restoring relationships. **Amen.**