

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10

Psalms 19

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21

Sermon January 23rd, 2022

Jesus Proclaims Something for Us to Believe In

For at least a century now God's people have been living under Roman rule. Unfortunately, their living conditions are far from ideal. Many people are living below the poverty line. Many people are marginalized from their community. Many people are imprisoned for challenging the Empire's oppressive ways of governance. Many face abuses from soldiers and tax collectors. Many are struggling with mental and/or physical ailments as a consequence of their living conditions. God's people are hurting, and longing for someone to come to heal and restore them from their suffering.

Well, according to Luke, this person named Jesus, has been going around to different synagogues throughout Galilee, telling people that he is this person. Jesus is the Messiah. Anointed with the Holy Spirit. Jesus has come to give good news to those suffering in poverty. To care for their needs. Jesus has come to liberate those suffering in prison for standing up for their rights. Jesus has come to liberate those marginalized people from the margins of society. Reconnecting them with their communities. Jesus has come to heal those who have been suffering with mental and/or physical ailments. Jesus has come to usher in the year of Jubilee. The year where everyone is supposed to experience God's healing and restoration.

Many people feel this is a message they can believe in. Others, still struggle to see this message coming to fruition in the midst of their suffering. If we read further on in this story, we do hear people express their doubts, and even their frustration with Jesus' message (**Image**).

When I reflect on the context, in which Jesus first delivers this message. And the doubts many people wrestle with in hearing his message. I think of the challenges we face in trying to hear a hopeful message in the midst of our suffering.

For example, you go through a nasty breakup with someone. You are wrestling with feelings of anger, loneliness, sadness, grief, doubt. You might even think you blew the one chance you had at happiness.

Then a close friend comes over, and listens to your lament (**Image**). They see that you are suffering so much, and want to help. They tell you that you are better off without that person. They tell you that you will find someone else who is better. There are plenty of fish in the sea. Right? They tell you that you will look back on this breakup

one day and see that this was meant to be. They tell you all these things with the hope that these messages might give you some comfort and hope for brighter days ahead.

But, in the moment it can be very hard to see any of these outcomes happening. Especially when the suffering we face stings so deep.

Going through a nasty breakup isn't the only example I can think of where our suffering makes it harder for us to hear the hopeful message of loved ones. It can happen when we grieve the death of a loved one, or when we are suffering from a chronic illness, or when we suffer from a traumatic event, like an accident, or when we are dealing with a major world event like a pandemic/war, or when we have lost our job, or when we are struggling through an existential crisis.

When we are standing in the darkness, it is hard for us to see the light. To see that there is an end in sight to this long dark tunnel we find ourselves in (**Image**).

And yet, as we see in our gospel, God will not give up on us. God will send people into our lives to give us a message of hope. To help us cling to God's promise that we will experience healing and restoration from our suffering. There will be someone new. Our heart will heal. Though we might be left with a little scar tissue. We will find the strength to carry on after experiencing the death of a loved one. We will find new meaning in our life as we redefine who we are without this person. We will find a way to cope with our chronic illness or even experience healing and new life from a treatment. We will heal from the wounds of this traumatic event. We will see the other side of this pandemic. The guns will go silent. We will find a new job. We will find ourselves again. Finally coming out of this existential crisis.

For the people Jesus is talking to in our story today. The poor will be cared for. Those who suffer injustice will experience justice. Those who are marginalized will be restored to their communities. Those who suffer physical ailments will experience healing. The world will be restored.

Like a caring friend, Jesus comes to us as we stand in the darkness, and proclaims a message for us to believe in. A message that promises us that we will experience God's healing and restoration. Through Jesus. Through the Spirit. Through the church. Through our loved ones.

In the letter to the first Corinthians, Paul reassures the church and us in the midst of suffering that through the Holy Spirit we are given the gifts we need to live out this message. To be Jesus' hands and feet in the world.

We might all come with different gifts, but we are all part of the same body. We all have a role to play in living out this message in our community. And when we find ways to work together, recognizing that our different gifts compliment one another, then we are

able to do a lot to bring healing and restoration to the poor, the marginalized, the mentally and physically ill, the incarcerated, all who suffer (**Image**).

As Jesus does throughout his ministry. As Jesus does throughout our lives.

This is what makes his message a message for us to believe in. Because we have seen Jesus at work in our lives and in the lives of others. Through the stories we hear in scripture. Through our neighbours' stories. Through our own stories.

We have experienced God's healing and redemption. Maybe not in the current darkness we are walking through. But we have experienced God's healing and redemption, and we will experience it again. Or this is what we hope. Because believing in this message isn't easy.

Sometimes our pain is overwhelming to say the least. Sometimes it is hard for us to cling to the faith we have received. But Jesus doesn't give up on us when we struggle to believe. Jesus doesn't stop loving us, because we doubt. Jesus continues to listen to our laments. Jesus continues to send messengers to us with this message of hope. This promise that God will heal us and restore us from our suffering. Just like God did a few years back when...I'll let you fill in the blanks.

Let us pray, loving God, thank you for giving us a message to believe in. A message that heals us, restores us, gathers us, enlightens us, and empowers us, to be your hands and feet in this world. Caring for the poor. Standing up for the marginalized. Healing the sick. Loving one another as you love us. **Amen.**

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