

Sermon: “Jesus’ Inaugural Address”
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Inaugural addresses are a critical part of the democratic process of this country. Regardless of whether or not we are supportive of the president-elect, I think it is accurate to say that most Americans look forward to the inaugural address.

Most presidents use their inaugural addresses to present their vision of America and to set forth their goals for the nation. President Lincoln used his second inaugural address in 1865, to name the evil of slavery, to move the nation towards resolving not only the war, but its cause; and his words resonate with us even today.

What do we expect to hear in an inaugural address? Inspiration, a summation of a strategic plan, a unifying message, perhaps. But, the reality is that we really hear what it relates to us and our reality. We have just heard President’s Obama’s address, and we all heard it differently.

But I think that we can all agree that words are powerful. Words can make or break us. And, there are words that matter more than others, like the words we use to invite someone on a first date may matter more than the words used for every date after that. The words we use to welcome someone into our home for the first time. The words we use to apologize, rather than the words we use to offend or hurt. Unfortunately, we tend to think that the more words we use the better it is -- and I often think the opposite is true.

So, what kind of words did we hear in Jesus’ address? Just a few words from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Jesus read from the book of Isaiah to declare his mission, vision, and ministry. He spoke words that echoed back to old hopes in the people who were listening. He echoed the words of the promises of God. The “someday” hope it has now become the “today” fulfillment.

So, Jesus’ Inaugural address, began with a statement of Good News:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.”

Marcus Borg called Jesus a “spirited man,” and he further stated that “for Jesus, the relationship with the Spirit led to a life of compassion in the world of the every day.” So, it is not just good news that we receive from Jesus, *but is good news to the poor -- because the Spirit leads perhaps not so much to mercy, but to compassion. Compassion means feeling with another right alongside them. Not from above, but from right alongside.*¹

Jesus came *not just* to release, but to release those who are captive, to give sight to *those who are blind* and to freedom to those who *are oppressed*. He presented his promises, but those words

¹ Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time

may matter more to those who are living in poverty, those whose who are blind, in those in captivity and in oppression.

And, aren't we are so tempted this morning to say, *that is not me...* I am not poor, blind, captive, or oppressed?

In a world that pressures us to always present a good appearance, how do we hear those words today? We tell ourselves that we really have it all together. That we can certainly do and achieve all things. We have commercials and media influencing our confidence, but deep down, we know the truth - our truth.

The truth is that, even we are sometimes thirsty for God's compassion, that yes, even we have felt poor in Spirit; yes, even we have been spiritually blind; even we have been captives of the limitations of our minds, captives of illness and circumstance within and out of our control.

So, how do we hear these words today? So, how do we follow? Robert Brearley writes "We have buildings, budgets, staff, and members, but do we have the power of the Holy Spirit?"²

To use, the adult's analogy, I hope we are not hearing Jesus words only in our heads, but in our gut, in our hearts, in our core.

While Jesus' message is good news, in order for us to hear it that way, it must first strike us as bad news -- the bad that we are not who we want to be, can be, should be. Jesus comes to bring us good news, but if we do not admit our needs, we will miss him.³

We have heard about Jesus' words this morning. We have heard his mission and vision; we have heard this strategic plan for his ministry. But, if we were to follow suit and we were articulate our mission as individuals, what would sum you up? How much we willing to reveal, to the world and even yourself?

And, how are Jesus words addressing you, calling you? How do you see yourself being good news to those around you?

And, as a community of faith, what are our dreams for this congregation? What can we do to be good news to the immediate community and world around us? I read this week in reference to a congregation something on the lines of "Afraid? *Come here and find courage.* Lonely? *Come join our community.* Ill? *Let us come to you and take care of you.* Isolated? *We will visit you.* Discouraged? *Let us gather together and encourage one another.*"⁴ What would describe us? How do we share our own words as the Body of Christ? Because words are powerful and words matter. They can heal or hurt. They can build or destroy.

And, how wonderful that our savior's words were directed at the poor, the outcast, the sick, and the blind! How wonderful that it includes those who are vulnerable, because perhaps that inspires

² Feasting on the Word Year C, Vol.1

³ David Lose, Luther Seminary

us to admit our deep hurts, fears, and longings. And, it is there, in the Avenue of Vulnerability, is that the good news of Jesus will become a reality in our lives. Because the sight that Jesus brings is meant for those made blind physically, and for those blind to the love and grace of God.⁵

This is our call, too. May our words mend broken hearts. May our words change lives. May we recognize that the Spirit of the Lord is upon us, too, and that we, too, are anointed to bring good news, healing, and freedom as instruments of God. Amen.

⁵ New Proclamation Year C 2007, Svennungsen