

Do Justice 5 - The Favorable Year of the Lord TODAY (The Gospels)

Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. We arrived in our biblical tour of "justice" at the Gospels yesterday. We started here - what was Jesus all about, that is, what was His mission and divine purpose? One good way to answer that is to look at how He introduces Himself or launches His public ministry in the Gospels. In Luke's gospel, that happens in his hometown synagogue ([Luke 4.14-22](#)).



2. That day, Jesus used a text in the Old Testament, [Isaiah 61.1-2](#), to explain His aims and intent. He came to proclaim "good news to the poor" (those barely hanging on financially and those who were destitute) and to proclaim "release to the captives." In Jesus' setting, there would be two primary reasons for someone to be a "captive": either they would be in debtor's prison or indentured servanthood due to financial hardship, or they were dissidents against the political and economic powers that be.

3. Moreover, Jesus' chosen text declared that He would "restore sight to the blind," and that blindness is not merely physical but also, according to the common use of "blindness" in the Old Testament, spiritual and moral. And Jesus would "set free the oppressed": that word "oppressed" literally means "the broken into pieces" or "the shattered" by life, broad enough to include so many hardships in life.

4. Isaiah 61.2a calls all these phrases that pertain to justice, equity, and restoration "the favorable year of the Lord," an allusion to the hope for a Jubilee, a time of restoration and relief (see [Leviticus 25](#)). And most remarkably, Jesus explained to the stunned audience that "TODAY - this very day - this scripture has been fulfilled (completed/brought to fruition) in your midst."

5. So much to unpack in this extraordinary introduction to the work and purpose of Jesus' ministry! First, recognize that there's an essential precursor to Jesus doing any of what Isaiah 61 describes - the blind, captive, poor, and oppressed must be seen, sought, and invited into relationship/community before they are freed or healed. Jesus did that throughout His ministry - He paused to engage beggars or the disabled along the roads that others might ignore, He didn't hesitate to go near contagious lepers, He sought out sinners and pariahs like tax collectors to be His meal companions, etc.

6. In the bible study *The God of Justice*, put together by The International Mission for Justice, we read, "Jesus saw people through God's eyes. Jesus saw children of God, made in God's image, human beings full of value, dignity, and faith...Justice means seeing people as God sees them, not as society sees them. So the work of justice means bravely defying social expectations and norms." Thus, for us to do justice like Jesus, it will require us to pay attention, notice, and engage in relationship those in our world that others push to the margins or ignore.

7. Second, doesn't it strike you that Jesus seemed a little premature in His bold proclamation that day in Nazareth? Isaiah 61.1-2 did not, in fact, break forth instantly, nor did its imperatives become a social reality during His public ministry, nor even after His resurrection from the dead. So in order for the "scripture to be fulfilled today," it required the buy-in and participation of His audience that day in Nazareth. That's still true - Jesus offers all of us a chance to be a part of what God is doing in the world and where God is taking it.

8. St. Teresa of Avila (Spain; 1500s CE) put it like this: "Christ has no body now but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassionately upon this world, Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good, and Yours are the hands, with which he blesses the whole world." More recently, Benedictine sister Joan Chittister wrote similarly, "We are here to do what Jesus did, in the way Jesus did it, for the reasons Jesus did it. If we do not do that, the Gospel remains an unread book, and Jesus remains a stranger to our time."

9. Last, don't forget that Luke 4.14-15 is a crucial lead-in to the events in Nazareth's synagogue. Namely, Jesus could only proclaim what He did, and then lead the movement that He started because He was "in the power of the Spirit." This is no surprise - the work of justice is too difficult, too slow, too controversial, and too countercultural to do on our own. As biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan wrote, "The Kingdom of God is a collaborative task between the human and divine. God will not do it without us, and we cannot do it without God."

10. Thus, each of us who want to be about Jesus' work of justice in the world need times when we consciously reconnect with God's Spirit - to lament, to refuel, to remember hope, to come back to center, to rest, to settle back into peace, etc. Desmond Tutu, the former archbishop of South Africa, described it in a simple, apt metaphor: "We are only the light bulbs. Our job is just to remain connected to the current. The light that shines from us, the power that breaks down the walls of division, is not ours. It is the Spirit of God. If we disconnect ourselves from that source, we are nothing but cold glass."

A Prayer for the Week

Lord God, Your Son Jesus Christ, my Teacher, stood in the synagogue and declared good news to the poor, release to the captives, and sight to the blind. May what breaks Your heart break mine. Give me the courage to speak as Christ spoke, and do as Christ did.

Your Son taught us that the first shall be last and the last shall be first, turning our human hierarchies upside down. Teach me to treat everyone with respect, to value the worth and contribution of those often overlooked, and to live everyday with appropriate humility.

Your Son assured us that whenever we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or welcome the stranger, it's as if we're doing it to You, oh God. Open my eyes to see Your face in my neighbors, especially those our world pushes to the margins.

And may Your kingdom come and Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Help me seek first Your goodness and justice so that I may not be merely a passive observer of Jesus, but His committed disciple here and now, amen.

More on Justice and Jesus

Here's a short piece that's a good overview of justice in the Gospels: [Jesus' Kind of Social Justice - Greg Boyd](#)

The resurrection of Jesus was, in part, God's defiant "NO!" in the face of Jesus' state-sponsored execution, itself a grave act of the worst kind of injustice: [Jesus' Resurrection and Social Justice](#)

One of the books we'll recommend to you next Monday, after our series on biblical justice concludes, is one that focuses on justice in the Gospels, entitled "Jesus and Justice" by Joash Thomas. Here are a) a short interview with the author about the book, b) a longer interview, and c) a free preview excerpt from the book, all on YouTube:

- [The Justice of Jesus: with Joash Thomas](#)
- [Christian Colonization and Its Effects: Joash Thomas Tells The Truth | The New Evangelicals](#)
- [The Justice of Jesus: Reimagining Your Church's... by Joash P. Thomas](#)

And here's another book we'll recommend to you next week, "What if Jesus was Serious about...Justice?" The first link is to an interview with the author, and the second is to a preview of the book itself:

- [What if Jesus was Serious About Justice? A Conversation with Skye Jethani](#)
- [What If Jesus Was Serious about Justice?: A... by Skye Jethani](#)