

Through the Greek word CHARA – which we translate to mean JOY – we see Grace (CHARIS) and Gratitude (the act of being grateful) (EUCARISTA).

Here we see that joy is intricately linked to gratitude. As followers of Christ, we are grateful, giving grace and charity as outward signs of our inward joy.

The text Barb read for us today has often been referred to as the “launching pad” for Jesus. From here his ministry “takes off” and he begins to fulfill the prophesy by doing exactly the stuff prophesied about, which is, indeed cause for great joy.

But there is more to this story than first meets the eye – there is more to this prophesy than we give credit to.

It starts with Jesus returning home. And, for some of you, returning home is a wonderful thing – for Jesus, though, it was a little more complicated. You see, he was very well known – like his father he was trained as a carpenter. And like all the little Hebrew boys before him, taught by the rabbi to read, recite and debate the scripture. And so, upon arrival, Jesus, as was his custom, came to the synagogue.

The synagogue is made-up more of lay people, and were led, a rabbi, a teacher

In worship, they would usually begin the gathering with a recital of the Shema: Here, O Israel, the LORD your God, the LORD alone: Shema, Y’Israel, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad. And then the greatest commandment: You shall love the LORD your GOD with ALL your heart, soul, mind and strength.

After that, the Psalm was sung and then a portion of the Torah – one of our first 5 books of the Bible. Then from the prophets – the Navi-im. Here, Jesus – who was likely like one of our own coming to visit after being away for a while – called up to recite the words of the prophet.

We don’t know whether Jesus was given a specific passage to read, or whether he just opened the scroll at a random place. But scripture says he “opened the scroll, found his place and he read.

Now, Barb read that portion of scripture for you but I want to expand a little on what Jesus said. Because we know that most Hebrew boys at least, during Jesus’ time would have been familiar to the text in ways that we today aren’t – seeing as their schooling was memorizing, reciting and understanding in the Torah, the Psalms and the Prophets. Even if Jesus did just read a portion of the larger text, the listeners would have hearkened back to their knowledge of the text and would have heard the whole thing in their minds.

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

**61** The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; <sup>2</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; <sup>3</sup>to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. <sup>4</sup>They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

<sup>8</sup>For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.

<sup>9</sup>Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.

<sup>10</sup>I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

<sup>11</sup>For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

And here I'll slip into the Luke passage: 4:20-21 <sup>20</sup> And Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

What Barb didn't read, is that it didn't take long for the people in Nazareth to figure out that he was a local boy and getting too big for his britches and they looked at each other with "that look" that only haters can really give that says, "quick, let's run him out of town...and if there's a cliff...who cares!" I think that the people stopped listening to Jesus when they figured out who he was...at least who they remembered him to be. And they stopped listening to what Jesus was actually saying.

Jesus isn't saying that he's the prophet Isaiah. No. Jesus isn't even talking about himself here at all. Jesus read the scroll, looked at the people and saw and gave witness to what GOD was/is doing RIGHT NOW.

And we, like the people then, just have trouble seeing it. And we, like the people in the synagogue then, just see the surface and, thus, falsely attribute to Jesus— what is God's wonderous work — of which Jesus the Christ is only in part.

In other words, we lump too much onto Jesus and forget to look at the greater picture of what God is doing in our world.

In other words, Jesus becomes the scapegoat for all that God is doing — and what we don't perceive God to be actively doing — in our world.

All the commands and the teachings and every story song and prophesy points to a God that not only *desires* our love in return but also desires that we love what God loves; primarily the earth, and all creation, and our neighbours — friends and enemies alike. Here in Isaiah we see it all laid out for us — God's manifesto and mandate to a lonely, despairing people in exile, and God's good word to the people in Jesus' time and still over the ages to our time today.

Let's unpack the beginning part of the prophesy. What is *the spirit*? In the Hebrew Bible there is no Trinity — there is no Father Son and Holy Spirit. If we look at the prophesy through this lens then — while it's not that different from our Holy Spirit — it still is a little different. The Hebrew word for spirit, here is ruach — which means wind, breath, air (as in the breath of God), or life, vigor, vivaciousness, or mood, emotion, disposition, and inspiration.

The **disposition** of Yahweh, the **breath** of Yahweh, the **life** of Yahweh is upon me because Yahweh has anointed me.

Anointed...What does THAT mean? In the Old Testament when someone was anointed it was an anointing to a special task, or to symbolize God's favor on an individual. For example – Samuel anointed David as the new king.

So we could say that the prophet, Isaiah, was “authorized” by God to: *Bring good news to the oppressed and to proclaim liberty to the captives and release for the prisoners.* Here, Isaiah is *not* talking about God releasing or liberating people who have committed crime – these people were usually executed. No, Isaiah was talking about prisoners of debt.

At the time of Isaiah, the Hebrew people had it awful. Not only were they in exile, but they all had lost their possessions, they were without a home in a strange land ruled over by overlords. Many were indebted to their overlords – and many more were indebted to each other. And many people could not pay their debts because they had nothing.

If you couldn't pay off your debt, often a family member was thrown into prison and the rest of the family was indentured – forced to work – often in horrible circumstances – to pay off the debt owed. Unfortunately, the money rarely came in and people were rarely freed from debtor's prison.

And here is an interesting thing. Jesus, concludes all the rest of the Isaiah scripture for the day with one statement: “to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor.”

That's the Jubilee. And then he said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in YOUR hearing”

Jesus, the teacher, the rabbi, interpreted the text – like we do every week in a sermon – and prophesied Yahweh's call for wholeness...Yahweh's call to the people to STOP, dissolve the debts owed, set the prisoner free, return the working to rest, tend what needs to be tended, heal the wounds that have festered, rebuild what was broken,...and to do it NOW.

And the people there in the synagogue were having none of it. After all, what would it be like for them to have to let go of all the things that they hold tightly – and trust that God will take care of it?

THIS unique portion of scripture becomes the CORE teaching of Jesus' ministry and becomes emblematic of the character of God that Jesus is living. So much so that that **every statement** and action that he made – in his life, in his death and in his resurrection was about justice, economics, forgiveness and liberation. EVERY SINGLE THING.

But – here I bring back what I said earlier. Sometimes I think we put too much on Jesus. We say, “I'm so glad Jesus did all that for me.” And we go and live our lives as if nothing has happened.

We put too much on Jesus –Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, rebelled against society's economic expectations – and we leave it at that. Because only Jesus could bring in the time of Jubilee.

We don't need to do any more because Jesus did it all. All we have to do is bask in his love.

To which I say, yes...but...

In the passage that Jesus read, he didn't say "who" was speaking – in fact - we miss the point if we spend a lot of time trying to figure out who is "me" in both the Isaiah and the Luke text.

The ME isn't the important part here. The emphasis of the passage is not on the speaker, but the emphasis is on the message that **GOD** has given the messenger – **to proclaim, to bind, to comfort and to release**. Why is the messenger to do this? Because GOD has anointed the messenger for this purpose.

It is God who anoints. It is God who sent. It is God's will that the messenger is sent to bring, proclaim, teach, preach bind and give. The point of this prophecy is not on WHO has been anointed but WHO has anointed them and WHAT they have been anointed to do.

This prophesy is also about **us**. But even more importantly, **it's about God** – a God who loves the world so much that God sends out messengers to bring good news, to bind and heal, to proclaim liberty, to cancel debt, to comfort, to provide for those who mourn. Who celebrate the Jubilee every year – not just every 50 years or whenever their religious leaders tell them too.

It is about God sending out messengers to bring good news, to bind and heal, to proclaim liberty, to cancel debt, to comfort...

God anoints us to bring good news **to the oppressed**,

to bind up **the brokenhearted**,

to proclaim liberty to **the captives**,

and release to **the prisoners**;

<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the The LORD's favor,

and the day of vengeance of God;

to **comfort all who mourn**;

<sup>3</sup> to provide for **those who mourn**

- to **give them a garland** instead of ashes,

the **oil of gladness** instead of mourning,

the **mantle of praise** instead of a faint spirit.

This week – as we anticipate Christ coming into our lives – think about what Jesus and Isaiah are preaching.

What does it mean for the spirit of God to come upon you?

What does it mean to celebrate with gratitude and joy everyday like it is the year of Jubilee?