

Nehemiah 8: 103, 5-6, 8-10
Psalm 119
1 Corinthians 12: 12-31a
Luke 4: 14-21

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St. Peter's Glenside
January 23, 2022
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The Fierce Urgency of Now - Again

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer, AMEN.

There's an editing term in film and television, that many of you might know, it's "jump cut" which refers to a change from one scene to another that leaves your head spinning. Wait, what just happened?

My head is spinning this morning because last month we were at the manger and now, Jesus is 30 years-old and preaching for the first time. With the exception of when he went missing in the synagogue at about age 12, we know nothing about his infancy or childhood. When did he take his first step or say his first word?

But perhaps we know more than we realize. Think of your mother.

Are there things she said to you that still reverberate in your head? My mom would say "Make it happy day!" when she dropped us off at school. But the one I remember most is when I stayed home from school, miserable with something or other, and she'd say, "When you're sick, I'm sick."

And what's striking in today's scripture from Luke are echoes of the Magnificat, his mother, Mary's, powerful words.

Jesus, in today's gospel, gives the inaugural sermon of his ministry. He articulates what today some might call his mission statement. He tells us that filled with the Holy Spirit, he will bring "good news to the poor," "release to the captives," and "let the oppressed go free."

Doesn't that resonate in you with Mary's words after The Annunciation when she, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit? This obscure teenage girl, with no status in her own culture, now knows she has found favor with God. Generations will call her "blessed." Not only has God done "great things" for her. "He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate." The poor have been fed and the rich, sent away empty."

It's intriguing to wonder about how much of Jesus's character was shaped by his mother. Jewish mothers, after all, have a history of telling it like it is. Lutheran pastor and theologian Karoline Lewis asks:

...what if Jesus first learned to bring good news to the poor from the stories his mother told him? About Elizabeth, the mother of his cousin John. About Sarah, his ancestor, who experienced the same shame.

What if he watched his mother and listened to her and saw her as someone who not only had the good news proclaimed to her but embodied its presence in her life?

This to me is a way to not only open a familiar text, but also imagine a greater and more influential role for Biblical women like Mary whose stories, after all, were written down by men years after they happened.

In a few short weeks, Jesus has been born, baptized, spent 40 days in the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, and then, emerges today, back in Nazareth, his sleepy village, doing what he always did growing up, going to the synagogue on the sabbath where he'd be among the family and friends who knew him best.

He's invited to read, and comment on the scripture. His choice, Isaiah. "The spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor..." But there's a twist. Jesus not only says he has been *anointed*, but he adds this: "*Today*, the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

TODAY is the word that blows everything up. Isaiah's words are no longer a promise, but a verb. TODAY, Jesus's ministry begins; the booster rockets have been ignited. He has told us who he is and never wavers after doing so.

Dr. Diana Butler Bass, author and theologian, writes that the word TODAY changes everything:

"Today" is a deeply dangerous spiritual reality—because today insists that we lay aside both our memories and our dreams to embrace fully the moment of now. The *past* romanticizes the work of our ancestors; the *future* scans the horizons of our descendants, and depends upon them to fix everything. But "today" places us in the midst of the sacred drama, reminding us that we are actors and agents in God's desire for the world. 'Today' is the most radical thing Jesus ever said."

Today is the most radical thing Jesus ever said. Continues Butler Bass:

Living in God's promise is not about yesterday. Nor is it about awaiting some distant Messiah and the eternal life in the kingdom of God. It is about NOW. This is a hard truth to hear and receive.

Hard because it demands action. Jesus is calling us to TODAY, just as Dr. Martin Luther King did in his "Letter from the Birmingham Jail." White clergy while supporting King's calls for racial justice, wanted him to slow down, take more time. King wrote:

For years now, I have heard the word "wait." It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This "wait" has almost always meant "never." . . . We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

Later in his letter, King wrote "I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour."

We're once again at a decisive hour as a nation. Our democracy is in real peril. I remember being at St. Peter's, a polling place, last election day. I admired the dedication of the poll workers who spent hours volunteering in a very long, if not boring, day.

But I never thought they were in danger. Three states are now considering creating special election police forces to monitor voter and election fraud. According to the Brennan Center of Justice, 19 states have recently passed 33 laws making it harder to vote. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act was defeated last week in the Senate.

In a sermon at New York's Riverside Church in 1967, Dr. King warned that unless we act in "the fierce urgency of now" our aspirations for peace may join "the bleached bones and residues of numerous civilizations where it is written: the pathetic words, 'Too late.'"

Jesus belonged to *today*. His first sermon was a call to action. As his followers, we know to whom we belong. That's the easy part. But what we are going to do about it is the question. What does "the fierce urgency of now" mean for you? AMEN

Diana Butler Bass in her sermon *The Power of Today* . <http://day1.org/7044-the-power-of-today>