

“Fulfilled in Your Hearing”
Luke 4:14-21; Psalm 19

Psalm 19

¹The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork.
²Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
³There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;
⁴yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
⁵which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
⁶Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat.

⁷The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure,
making wise the simple;
⁸the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
⁹the fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.
¹¹Moreover by them is your servant warned;

in keeping them there is great reward.

¹²But who can detect their errors?

Clear me from hidden faults.

¹³Keep back your servant also from the insolent;

do not let them have dominion over me.

Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Luke 4:14-21

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.

¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom.

He stood up to read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.

The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

²¹Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

The Sermon

The reports coming in from all over the countryside were that he was going around teaching in all the synagogues, and he was amazing. So, by the time he'd made it back to his hometown on a sabbath day, we had kind of been expecting him.

During the service, when he stood and was handed the Isaiah scroll, he unrolled it and read the lines about

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor;
sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And when he sat down—the customary posture for teaching—our eyes were riveted, and he said to us:

“Today this scripture which you have heard”—in the Greek, literally ‘the scripture in your ears’—“is being brought to fulfillment.”ⁱ

Wonderful, isn’t it?

But perhaps you will forgive someone who was there in worship that day if we didn’t jump up and down with glee the moment he spoke those words.

In August, 1920, a newspaper called the Detroit News set up, in their own building, an apparatus by which they wanted to harness the twenty-some-year-old technology called “radio” and do something brand new: to cast broadly—broadcast—information to the local community.

Actually, they had the idea, but they couldn’t get it to work, so, naturally—this is true—they brought in a teenager, named Michael

DeLisle Lyons, and they gave him the instructions, first to set it up and get it to work, and then to “explain it to them.”ⁱⁱ

He spent ten days working out the kinks, during which time all they played was music. “These concerts,” the newspaper later reported, “were enjoyed by no one” except a few hobbyists who happened to have their equipment running.ⁱⁱⁱ

But finally, on the night of August 31, 1920, they went on the air with the results of that day’s local, state and congressional primaries, and the next day, the newspaper printed a short item about what is believed to have been the first ever news broadcast. It concluded with these words:

“In the four hours that the apparatus, set up in an out-of-the-way corner of The News Building, was hissing and whirring its message into space, few realized that a dream and a prediction had come true. *The news of the world was being given forth through this invisible trumpet to the waiting crowds in the unseen market place.*”^{iv}

That night’s broadcast began the age that has brought us
 every news item,
 every inspiring or appalling piece of music,
 every opinion,
 every soul-stirring speech,
 every set of pundits spitting froth and nonsense at each other,
 and every unfolding news story
 that you have ever seen or heard by radio, television or online.

We would hear it on the radio when JFK was assassinated, and we would see Walter Cronkite’s demeanor speak more eloquently than words could ever do, in the six seconds of silence as he gathered himself after delivering the news.

We would watch in awe as humanity reached into space and landed on the moon.

We would be more united as a nation than at any other point in my lifetime in the days following 9/11, in our shock and utter disbelief. People who had hardly ever said this to anyone even in their own families were telling co-workers, neighbors, strangers in conversation that they loved them. People who hadn't done anything religious in years flooded back into worship places. And all of this mainly because all day long, for many days, everybody—everybody—had their eyes on a TV screen.

It began that night, August 31, 1920, with the first instance of a news broadcast from a small corner of the News Building in downtown Detroit.

The benefit to humankind of that capacity is incalculable.

But my, that is a lot of words. And like any other arena where free human expression reigns, there is also malevolence and hatefulness, unfairness and falsehoods and spite and distortion and nonsense.

And especially where there are massive fortunes to be made pandering to our worst instincts and playing on our most primal fears, we find ourselves saying with Psalm 123,

“O Lord, have mercy upon us,
for we have had more than enough of contempt.”^v

And in the present environment, with that endless cacophony of voices chattering, clamoring and agitating, sometimes it's hard to hear what God is saying—or sometimes even to know if God is saying or doing anything at all.

So, there we were in the synagogue, hearing Jesus read from Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,” and then for that day's sermon, he said:

“Today the scripture in your ear is being brought to fulfillment.”

He said that. But it wasn’t necessarily easy to hear him.

Because we’d heard about this “year of the Lord’s favor” before.

In ancient times, God had told Moses to tell the people:

Every seven years is like the days of the week: work the land for six, and then the land shall observe a sabbath year for me. Do that seven year cycle seven times—49 years—and the 50th year is to be your jubilee year.^{vi} This is spelled out in Leviticus.

And in that hallowed 50th year, “you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants...

“You shall return, every one of you, to your property and to your family.”

Slaves go back home. Crushing debts are cancelled. In the year of jubilee, you get to go back to what once was, and is meant to be again, *your* property.

Now, if it’s a dwelling house in a walled city, it stays in the buyer’s family. But houses in villages are classed as open country, and they are all to be released back to the original owners in the jubilee.^{vii} And the same thing with fields.^{viii}

A time of breathtaking renewal and restoration wherein economic injustices, imposed by people who had hoarded too much for themselves and had amassed the power to hold onto it, would all, by God’s sacred command, return it to the people from whom it had been taken—even in technically “legal” but morally dubious circumstances.

In the Year of Jubilee, all the inhumanely hoarded Monopoly money and property gets redistributed and everybody starts back on the “Go” square.

Which sounded great for the people from whom much had been taken, and could be survived, if not necessarily enjoyed, by those who had made their way to the top of the ladder.

But guess what: there is no record of any jubilee year ever having taken place.^{ix} There is no known instance of the People of God ever observing the Year of Jubilee.

Imagine that: God’s direct instruction not being followed by people of means and advantage who have something material to lose by obeying God’s command.

Well, how are you going to make it happen? Nobody is going to go along with that without a fight, as far as they need to take it.

So, what now is this message being brought to the synagogue of the people in Nazareth, who not only had a tough enough time making ends meet in their own individual circumstances, but were, as a people, struggling under the heel of a Roman Empire that was always ready and more than willing to step in and crush another Jewish Revolt any time they wanted to try it?

We’d heard about the Year of the Lord’s Favor before. We’d been hearing about it for a thousand years. Never seen it happen.

And here we are. Sick and tired, absolutely fed up: we have had more than enough of contempt.

Sometimes, in the silence of the night, we long for God to say something to us.

And sometimes, in the cacophony, we can barely hear a word God is saying anyway.

With all the background noise of our lives, and even moreso when the background noise moves to the foreground, it's so easy to get caught up in things that are not essential, and lose sight of things that are essential.

I get so distracted by, and spend so much time on, so many things that will matter to me not at all when it's time to look back on the mortal life that I was given.

And I need to hear, and know, and sense, and feel,
 the God who breathed life into us in this breathtaking cosmos,
 who created for us an order in which no one was to hoard anything
 so that we would all be sure that everyone had enough,
 who teaches me to love my neighbor self-sacrificially,
 who saved the world by loving us to his own death.

Talk to me, God. Speak louder, or help me *hear around* all the sounds that get in the way.

My soul *needs* to be revived;
 my simple, preoccupied mind *needs* wisdom;
 my jaded, worrying heart *needs* something to rejoice about;
 my dimming eyes *need* to be enlightened;
 I need something that will endure forever,
 other than the continents of plastic garbage floating in the oceans.
 I need to hear a word that is righteous.

I give you a new commandment: that you love one another.
 Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another (John 13:34).

You shall love the Lord your God
 with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.
 And you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:28-31).

“And who was a neighbor?” asked Jesus.
 “The one who showed mercy” (Luke 10:36-37).

“You have heard [in a thousand different ways], ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:43-44).

You know, O mortal, what is good:
 And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice,
 and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).

“Today,” he said, “the scripture in your ears is being brought to fulfillment.”

*Day to day pours forth speech,
 and night to night declares knowledge.
 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;
 yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
 and their words to the end of the world.*

As the message is flung into space, a dream and a prediction come true.

The news of the world “is being given forth through this invisible trumpet to the waiting crowds in the unseen market place.”^x

Even in your hearing of the Word—just the landing of the scripture on your ear or before your eyes or in your soul—something holy is already happening. The spiritual relationship between God and you and the world is coming to tangible fruition, inviting you to spread the Good News amid the specific challenges of our time.

So here in my circumstances, no matter what they may be—whether the cacophony of noise or the stunning silence—let me commit again to doing what I need to do to be more faithful to God, to the world, to the

people around me and to the silent suffering, of whom I remain customarily unaware.

Let me find in God the strength to do no more than what God has already told me is good and right and true, knowing that with God, all things are possible.

And let me be the person God created and called me to be, so that I might take part in ushering in, to set the whole world free, the year of the Lord's favor.

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ⁱ Translation of Luke 4:21 from Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina Series, Vol. 3 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 77.

ⁱⁱ John C Abell, "Aug. 31, 1920: News Radio Makes News," in *Wired* (online magazine: <https://www.wired.com/2010/08/0831first-radio-news-broadcast/>, August 31, 2010)

ⁱⁱⁱ Abell, "News Radio"

^{iv} Abell, "News Radio" (emphasis added)

^v Psalm 123:3

^{vi} Leviticus 25 and 27:17-24

^{vii} Leviticus 25:10ff

^{viii} Lev 27:17-24

^{ix} See Samuel Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*, 90 and Barbara Cawthorne Crafton in *Feasting on the Gospels*, Luke Vol. 1, 98-102.

^x Abell, "News Radio" (emphasis added)