

“Not Someday, But Today”  
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St. Luke’s Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky  
St. Luke’s Day – 17 & 18 October 2015  
Luke 4:14-21

Someday things will be better. All of us, at some point, have thought or uttered those words. When sick or injured, whether in body, mind, or spirit, we look forward to a future when we will become whole and healthy again. When we feel trapped like a captive, with no way out, by circumstances beyond our control or by the consequence of our own choices, we pray that someday things will be better.

When we feel oppressed like a refugee, cast out and excluded because we are different in a way that others find unacceptable, God’s grace can give us the vision to see that someday things will be better, no matter how impossible that may seem, that we will find a place where we belong, where people honor and celebrate diversity, where we need not sacrifice our integrity on the altar of conformity but rather simply be who we are.

When we feel a sense of poverty, whether material or spiritual, someday things will be better. Some who suffer material poverty will always find their aspirations to affluence frustrated. As Jesus once said “the poor will always be with you.” Yet wisdom can reveal the truth that being poor and being joyful need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, many who are rich are miserable, mired in the fear of loss, in a consuming desire to acquire more, in a mindset in which the word “enough” has no meaning. Many who are poor by worldly standards possess treasures with a value no currency can match.

Of course, we cannot ignore or forget the poor. Much of our mission as disciples of Jesus focuses on justice, on giving relief to desperate people who lack the basics required to sustain life. Wealth without mercy and generosity undermines itself. A world void of these virtues leads inevitably to violence and destruction.

As for those who endure spiritual poverty, God never stops giving. All we need do is receive with humility, to accept without pride or shame the peace God offers, knowing that we cannot earn or deserve it. Someday things will be better. That promise of fulfillment in the future propels us forward, whatever our cause for distress, but we don’t really want to wait for that someday, and we don’t need to, because that someday is today.

After Jesus read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in his hometown synagogue at Nazareth, he did not say, “Someday this scripture will be fulfilled in your hearing.” No, Jesus said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Obviously, these words from Jesus did not automatically and for all time release captives,

free the oppressed, or heal the blind, because from that moment in the synagogue until today, people have been and still remain captive, oppressed, blind, and poor.

Maybe Jesus misspoke, or maybe Luke garbled Jesus' message, but I don't think so, because that single word "today" is the first word Jesus publicly spoke in Luke's gospel, apart from reading the passage from Isaiah, and that makes it exceptionally important, the type of thing that meticulous Luke would have gotten exactly right.

Unlike the other gospel accounts of Jesus' baptism, in Luke, Jesus says nothing at the River Jordan. Jesus does speak when being tempted in the wilderness, but this was a private exchange between him and the devil. Other gospels that mention Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth don't place the story at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, as Luke did, but far deeper, after a number of miracles and teachings had occurred. Yet Luke puts Jesus' interpretation of Isaiah at the very beginning, and the first word of his own that comes out of Jesus' mouth in a public setting is "Today."

There's a powerful, irresistible immediacy in that proclamation; not a someday things will be better, as we're accustomed to thinking, but right now. Jesus is saying that wherever he is, the poor receive good news, the captives find release, the oppressed go free, and the blind can see. Not someday, but right now. Yet how can that be true, when the evidence seems to contradict the claim so clearly?

Jesus is the anointed one, the Messiah, empowered by the Spirit to fulfill the prophecy. In his own person, he embodies the promise fulfilled. Wherever and whenever Jesus is, there is potential and possibility. Just as Jesus long ago made himself manifest in human form, so also Jesus continues to be embodied and present in a different way through us, if we allow him to dwell in us, so that we may abide in him, united in love.

Jesus, present and working through us, may not instantly bring everyone out of poverty and onto the pathway that our world defines as success, but Jesus can deliver good news to the poor that lifts them above poverty even as they struggle to survive. As Jesus makes abundantly clear in the gospels, he wants to do both, and sometimes he empowers us to do both, but the good news to the poor is Jesus, and we can deliver that to those who are poor either materially or spiritually.

Jesus, present and working through us, may not instantly heal the many ailments that afflict the eyes, depriving people of sight, though sometimes that happens, just as Jesus did heal the blind occasionally in the gospels. Instead, all of us have impaired vision to some degree, and I'm not talking about those of us who wear glasses or contacts. Everybody has trouble seeing reality for what it is. Our assumptions, preferences, and prior

experiences shape everything we see, including Jesus, but when Jesus is present with us and others, clarity of perception can return, even if only for a brief time, and that glimpse is often all we need to live faithfully.

Jesus, present and working through us, has not and probably never will liberate all those who are captive and oppressed until his coming again in glory. However, the presence of Jesus reveals that people are not defined by what captivates and oppresses them, whether it is figurative or literal.

Perhaps the best recent example of this is Nelson Mandela, imprisoned on an island off of South Africa's coast for decades. Eventually, he was released and was elected President, but that would not have been possible if the presence of Jesus had not sustained Mandela during his incarceration. He did not break, because Jesus held him together, even in the midst of his captivity and oppression. We may think that only a very few can be like him, but Jesus brings the possibility of liberation and transformation to everyone, and we are called to serve as agents who reveal that hope to all people.

Today, not someday, things can be better, perhaps not in the way we and others most want, but in the way we and others need most. It is the unfolding of the fulfillment of the promise of the prophecy that offers us peace, as we and all people receive sight, freedom, and the relief of good news through Christ alive in us and others. Amen.