

“Bring Good News”

Sermon – January 26, 2025 Stone Presbyterian Church

As Major League Baseball catcher and unique spinner of aphorisms Yogi Berra said, “It’s déjà vu all over again.”

As you know the lectionary cycles through every three years, so the scripture passages I preach on are the same every three years for the most part.

I generally look back at my previous sermons so I don’t preach the exact same message, though I am fully aware, as my wife Helen points out, no one would remember if I even preached a sermon, let alone what it was about.

Still, let me quote to you from the beginning of my sermon on January 23, 2022.

Quote, “Football. That’s what is on Hal and Linda Rance’s minds—and Rob and Lauralyn Kolb’s as well I’m sure. Because tonight at 6:40 p.m. on CBS the Rance’s Buffalo Bills play the Kolbs’ Kansas City Chiefs for the AFC Divisional playoff.

The Bills beat the Chiefs in October during the regular season, but 364 days ago the Chiefs beat the Bills for the AFC Championship.” Unquote.

The more things change, the more they stay the same—though I know Linda is hoping for a different outcome this time!

As I’m sure you recall, the sermon was entitled “There is no ‘I’ in Team” and used a football team with its unique positions as an analogy for the epistle lesson of the body and its members.

Three years before that on January 27, 2018 my sermon title and topic was “*E pluribus unum*”. A Latin phrase that literally means “Out of many, one.”—the original motto of the United States of America, a concept that has only further diminished in the past six years.

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So “naturally” last month I decided today’s theme should be “bring good news.” Why? Because today’s gospel lesson reminds us to do so.

Today’s passage takes place right after Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness—a story we’ll hear at the beginning of Lent in six weeks. Jesus, now filled with power of the Holy Spirit, begins his mission, starting in Galilee. In Luke’s gospel Jesus is flying solo for some indeterminate time. It will be the next chapter before he calls any disciples.

Jesus is teaching in synagogues all around the region, faithfully attending the synagogue on the Sabbath. Though we don’t know what he was teaching exactly, it appears that he interpreting the scriptures in engaging ways that people admired.

Then he comes to his hometown of Nazareth where we hear in Luke’s Gospel the first words of Jesus’s public ministry. There in the synagogue on the Sabbath, Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, a compilation of from what we would call Isaiah chapter 58 verse 6 and chapter 61 verses 1 and 2.

Right here, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus tells us clearly his mission. He boldly claims to fulfill the words of Isaiah, who speaks of the Spirit anointing him, sending him, compelling him to bring good news to every one of God’s children who is bound up, pressed down, broken in spirit, impoverished, imprisoned, and desperately hungry for good news.

These are not just words of scripture that will happen someday. These are happening today through him. And Jesus is not just talking about the spiritual aspect of salvation. Jesus’ mission is to free people from

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captivity to sin *and* from captivity to the sinful structures and systems that diminish and destroy lives.

As we will hear in the rest of the story next week, this is welcomed news to all who heard it—until Jesus drops a truth bomb on them.

We see a bit of that today.

Americans are used to the idea of freedom as license to do as one wishes.

Jesus, however, understands freedom differently. It is a release from captivity to death, the will of others, and the will of the self.

As Paul points out in today’s epistle passage, though there are many members, we are one body in Christ and that God has so arranged it this way so that there may be no dissension within the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

This week we saw the challenges of bringing good news to the poor and be one in the body of Christ with no dissension.

On Tuesday, as they traditionally do the day after the presidential inauguration, the Washington National Cathedral hosted an interfaith Service of Prayer for the Nation. In this special service, the Cathedral gathers with their interfaith and ecumenical partners to offer prayers of thanksgiving for our democracy and to seek God’s guidance in the years ahead.

Episcopal Bishop the Right Reverend Mariann Budde gave the sermon, which I posted the link to it on my and Stone Church’s Facebook pages. It was a beautiful sermon in its own right in its call for unity through honoring the dignity of every human being, through honesty in our discourse, and through humility in ourselves and our actions.

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It was also a master class in preaching the good news in an eloquent, engaging way, not snarky and judgmental. I wish I could preach as well. If you haven't already, I urge you to watch the video.

When you do watch it, you will see what all the hullabaloo has been about. Namely, that at the end she implored the President to have mercy on gay, lesbian and transgender children, on immigrants, and on their families, saying “Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were once strangers in this land.”

She wasn't saying let anything go. She was simply saying have compassion on the weak and vulnerable, something we should do for all, even sinners and lawbreakers. That is, treat people humanely, treat them like human beings. For that she received a lot of flack—and a lot of kudos.

So, as we go forth as the body of Christ to bring the good news to the poor and the oppressed despite the headwinds we may encounter, let me close with this blessing from the conclusion of Bishop Budde's sermon:

“May God grant us the strength and courage to honor the dignity of every human being, to speak the truth to one another in love and walk humbly with each other and our God for the good of all people, good of all people in this nation and the world. Amen.”