

January 26, 2025

“Good, Hard News”

Based on Luke 4:14-30. Jesus Preaches in His Own Hometown

Every so often in the cycle of Sundays comes along a passage from the Revised Common Lectionary that matches the present moment more perfectly than any preacher could manufacture on their own.

This is one such Sunday.

Jesus, preaching good news in his own hometown, with specific examples from the Scriptures of what that good news looks like.

It is hard to hear.

The people in the pews want it to be about them, right here in Nazareth. How Great *We* Art, they want to sing, with our own homegrown leader emerging from *our* care and nurture!

Jesus tells them otherwise.

The good news of God, Jesus says, works through foreigners. The good news of God, Jesus says, even sometimes works through our hated enemy.

It is a hard pill to swallow, for them and for us.

On the one hand, for example, we may find ourselves cheering Jesus on, in the spirit of Episcopal Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde this week, pleading mercy for immigrants and the LGBTQIA+ community during a prayer service at the National Cathedral and standing her ground in the ongoing onslaught.

Absolutely! We will rightly say. *This* is what Jesus means when he proclaims *good news to the poor ... release to the captives ... recovery of sight to the blind ... and liberty to the oppressed.*

Absolutely! We will rightly say. This is what speaking truth to power looks like, gently but firmly rooted in the goodness of the gospel, passing right on through the midst of the haters who work their hardest to throw us off a cliff.

Absolutely! We will rightly say. Doing it all with grace and dignity and genuine love for the ones with whom we adamantly disagree.

We are doing those things, too, we will rightly say, here at SPC: through our Immigrant and Refugee Support Committee and our More Light Team and our volunteers with the Eastern Panhandle Youth Alliance and just generally being the church that Chooses Welcome, that strives to practice Radical Hospitality, Holistic Spirituality, and engaged Compassion.

This is who *we* are, we will rightly say! Yay us!

On the other hand, do we really want to admit God can work through *our* enemies?

I don't.

And yet here we are, as Than Hitt described in our Sunday Seminar session on clean water a couple of weeks ago, building coalitions in Jefferson County across lines of division we never thought possible in order to protect the land we love and its inhabitants from the harmful impacts of proposed development in Middleway.

And yet here we are, as our Guns to Gardens program has learned over the past two years, building coalitions with police officers and avid gun enthusiasts to keep our kids safe from trauma.

And yet here we are, as our partnership with the Community Cup ministry in Martinsburg has learned, building coalitions with evangelicals (gasp!) and business owners to offer a warm, safe third space for people without permanent shelter or with substance abuse disorders or who just need a place to be for a while without having to explain why.

God's Good News is happening *through* us, to be sure. But it is far bigger than just us. It may even include those we call *enemy*. Which is where humility comes in.

Like Jesus, two Sundays ago, we claimed our Belovedness in our Baptism, whether we have been officially sprinkled with sacramental water or not. We have celebrated and affirmed the grace of God that is here for us all - indeed, for all of creation - *no matter what*.

Like Jesus, last week, we grappled with the baptismal call to *renounce evil and its power in the world*, both within ourselves and beyond ourselves, with the ministry of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. as our guide.

Today we begin the long, hard journey of *practicing* our baptism, as Jesus does in this his first sermon and beyond, all the way up to the cross. Our Baptism is not a one and done experience but rather a commitment to a Way of Life in the Spirit of Good, Hard News, knowing that evil exists in the world and doing our part to live a different way. We continue to practice our Baptism in this Way of Life until our Baptism is finally made complete in our death.

We cannot practice our Baptism with an expectation of reward or glory or picking the winning team. (Even though, **wink** we did!) We must practice our Baptism with a spirit of disciplined discernment, willing to bear

the backlash if we must, not seeking out conflict and controversy but not shying away from it either, always with a hand extended to anyone willing to bridge the gap with us.

For Jesus, the journey of practicing his baptism is just beginning in our Lesson, as he moves on from Nazareth, preaching and teaching and healing with Good, Hard News for anyone who will listen. For Mariann Edgar Budde, the journey of practicing her baptism is just beginning, at least at this high profile, as she explains to anyone who will listen why she did what she did and will continue to do it. For us, the journey of practicing our baptism is just beginning in its own way, as we ordain and install an incoming class of leaders and solidify our commitments for what I hope will be decades to come.

While we cannot know for sure what exactly the future holds, as we practice our baptism, we *can* know for sure the Spirit of love and the Song of Eternity that holds us through it.

And we can know for sure that are not alone.

And we can know for sure that we *can* do this!