

Citizenship 102 (Purpose) –Luke 4:14-21  
 Saint Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 3d Sunday after the Epiphany (January 27) 2013

“And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup> And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

<sup>16</sup> And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

<sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
 because he has anointed me  
 to proclaim good news to the poor.  
 He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
 and recovering of sight to the blind,  
 to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

<sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Words, words, words. We use them all the time, but they don't all have the same value.

- Words used to invite someone on a **first date** are much different than words used to invite someone for every future date.
- Words used to **say good-bye to someone for the last time** are much different than words used in giving casual good-byes every day.
- Words that **heal** are much different than words that hurt.
- One of the most difficult passages in the Bible, for me, are ABOUT THE WORDS WE SPEAK, when Jesus said in **Matthew 12:36: *I tell you, on the day of judgment, you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; ...***

Other SPECIAL WORDS are those used in **INAUGURATION SPEECHES**. This past week, we heard **President Obama** give his second Inaugural Address, using words that receive much more attention – both currently and historically – than daily words.

We remember well what **John F. Kennedy** said in his Inaugural

Address: **Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country.** (Interesting words spoken and remembered by every school child of that generation, and yet words that would be seen as heresy by most people living in an entitlement age, and which were not much present in President Obama's speech.)

Even more unlikely to be spoken today, but powerfully remembered, are the words spoken by **Abraham Lincoln** in his **second Inaugural Address**, when he spoke of the national **sinfulness of slavery** and the terrible price in blood that the nation had to pay because of it.

Some words are different from others.

Jesus' first public preaching words in Luke's Gospel that we heard today read were His Inauguration Address. Today, we heard Jesus set forth both His Agenda and His Vision. It was about

- **The Kingdom of God**
- **Being anointed the Spirit of God through Him, and in Him, AND**
- **Turning things upside down - **good news to the poor; release for the captives; recovering of sight to the blind; setting at liberty those who are oppressed; and proclaiming the year of the Jubilee****

The Kingdom of God was at hand. And this was His purpose. The rest of Luke's Gospel can, and should, be interpreted in light of this.

Important words.

We ought to pay attention.

There's an old saying: **the Church is about comforting the afflicted**

and afflicting the comfortable.

**If you were an afflicted person** – poor, blind, imprisoned, or oppressed – these were indeed GOOD NEWS.

**If, however, you were a favored person**, or one who imprisons, one who oppresses, it might not seem like such good news.

In this sermon series Civics Lessons (ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD!) we learned last time -- in Class 101 -- about OUR IDENTITY: We are beloved children of God, precious and beautiful to behold. It is the mark of our BAPTISM. (On the tear off tab, the sea shell pictured has been a Christian symbol for Baptism over the past 2,000 years.)

But that was Civics Lesson 101.

The Kingdom of God is more than just our IDENTITY. It also includes OUR PURPOSE.

If we think the Kingdom of God is ONLY “I go to the Garden alone while the dew is still on the roses ... and He walks with me and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own” then we are a school drop out – quitting after Civics 101.

From the very beginning of God’s covenant making (Genesis 12:1ff.) the message is clear: **we are blessed to be a blessing**.

Today, we heard about the PURPOSE:

- **The Kingdom of God**
- **Being anointed the Spirit of God through JESUS, and in JESUS, AND**

- **Turning things upside down - good news to the poor; release for the captives; recovering of sight to the blind; setting at liberty those who are oppressed; and proclaiming the year of the Jubilee**

I DARE – or in the words of the movie *Christmas Story* –**TRIPLE DOG DARE YOU** – to find me language from Jesus’ lips in the Gospels that He came to earth primarily in order to give us a get-out-of-earth-bypass-hell-when-you-die-card.

The Kingdom of God **IS AT HAND!** AND

- **The Kingdom of God**
- **Being anointed the Spirit of God through JESUS, and in JESUS, HAS A PURPOSE OF**
- **Turning things upside down - good news to the poor; release for the captives; recovering of sight to the blind; setting at liberty those who are oppressed; and proclaiming the year of the Jubilee**

**You see: we don’t do these things Jesus purposed in order to get into the Kingdom. Rather we do these things because we ARE citizens of the Kingdom.**

Barbara Lundblad, a preacher of some national reputation that I hear whenever I go to the national Festival of Homiletics conferences, imagines what might have happened in TODAY’S HOMETOWN CHURCH for those hearing Jesus’ Inauguration Address:

**You’re sitting in the back pew. You’re perhaps a long time member knowledgeable of all things theological. You begin to murmur as you**

question Jesus' preaching ability. "He should've said something about forgiveness," you suggest. Or sin. Another person chimes in reminding the crowd that the whole Bible can't be preached in one sitting. The conversation becomes more animated as it turns to the content of the Isaiah passage. The conversation goes on and on, implying the ease of conversation as opposed to action. As the crowd departs to a local coffee house for more mental gymnastics, the lone janitor cleans up, the words of the prophet Isaiah resounding in his ears.

**If these are just words that we hear, even if we say they are of great importance, but do nothing more than just TALK ABOUT THEM – then they are not all that important – to us, even though they are CRITICALLY IMPORTANT TO JESUS!**

If every church in America were to adopt one homeless family, one family on welfare, and to provide the skills and mentoring and resources they had to coach that one family off welfare, THERE WOULD BE NO ONE LEFT ON WELFARE IN AMERICA.

- Every church in America. One Family. No one left on welfare.
- But we are content to put our Alms Offering into the plate on the first Sunday of the month.
- What is our Purpose?
- What is the Purpose of the Kingdom of God?

Just about every cause in America has a bracelet. I remember back in the 1970's people bought metal bracelets that carried the name and service number of a soldier MIA in Vietnam – the help them remember.

Today, we use these [demonstrating] rubberized bracelets.

Or you might think of this like the armband a quarterback wears to tell him the plays that will be called by the coach.

Today's bulletin tear off tab (along with a piece of tape you must provide – I couldn't figure out a way to attach that to the bulletin – although I will have a roll of tape at the back door when you leave) is to make yourself a bracelet.

- It's to remind you of **Who You Are**.
- It's also to remind you of **What Is Your Purpose**.
- **What will you do about it?**

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.**