

***“That Same Spirit on Me, Please”***

***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . .”*** Isaiah said it first . . . Jesus said it was about Him. ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . .”*** That Spirit does not merely hover, or draw near, or settle over us. That Spirit is active, vibrant, alive, empowering . . . how do we know? ***“ . . . 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, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”***

Let’s examine those Spirit-filled outcomes.

***“ . . . he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.”***

We see that at work in the ministry of Jesus. He fed five thousand because they were hungry; please note they were hungry, not just peckish (such hunger is a sure sign of poverty). He healed all the sick who were brought to Him in village after town after hamlet (people who would otherwise go untreated because they had no means to approach a physician). Most of the people who flocked around Jesus were poor; we learn that whenever one of the Gospel writers tells us differently. They mention no status of many who approach Jesus, but are quick to point out if one of the them is rich. And the Good News to the poor was that the kingdom of God has broken into history.

***“He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives . . .”***

While prisons in Jesus’ time were filled with all manner of folks — from those who had committed some form of mayhem (murder, insurrection, thievery) to those whose only offense was being poor (I have never understood the concept of debtor’s prison; how can anyone repay a debt if they are locked up?) — there was a form of imprisonment that Jesus addressed over and over again: spiritual bondage. We look at many of the stories in the Gospel of where Jesus is said to drive out this demon or that demon, and we are inclined to say, *“Wait! that sounds a lot like epilepsy or some form of psychosis.”* Indeed, there may have been a

biological/chemical/medical situation that the ancients attributed to demonization; but before you dismiss such exorcism accounts as mere misdiagnosis, ask yourself if it's not equally possible that we attribute symptoms to biological/chemical/medical without any consideration that something of the demonic may be involved. Who here has ever witnessed someone being demonized? How would you know? What would you look for?

***“He has sent me to proclaim . . . recovery of sight to the blind . . .”***

Jesus restored sight to more than one blind man (He may have done so for many women, as well . . . some of the many who were brought to Him in those many villages where He did healing; we just don't have a story to detail that happened.) Those of us with pretty good vision (mine is 20/20 . . .well, it was right after my cataract surgeries) tend to take that for granted. We are impressed by those who become blind and who then adapt themselves to the world around them. But I would guess that, for many of us, loss of sight would be an almost unimaginable tragedy. Imagine, then, what it must have been like for Jesus to come touch your blindness and to suddenly have the world come into view again! Talk about Good News!

Yet we often are blind to what goes on all around. We even speak of “putting on blinders” so that we can restrict our vision and not have to look at things we really don't want to see. Do you want to look at the pictures and videos that are pouring out of Haiti, or Kentucky, or Togo? I don't; yet we are bombarded with images of human misery and pain seemingly without end (both the images and the human suffering). Shall we blind ourselves to it? No! We look at it so that we can be driven to respond.

***“He has sent me . . . to let the oppressed go free . . .”***

If you ever wondered why it was that the people of Jesus' time and nation had such political and military hopes for the coming Messiah, this passage helps you comprehend. Without question, the people were fed up

with occupation after occupation of their land by outsiders — first the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, the Persians, the Macedonians, then the Seleucids, the Ptolemys, and the Romans. With the all-too-brief interruption of the rule by the Maccabees (about sixty years all told), for hundreds of years, some outside power had control over the Jews — such occupational rule was seldom anything less than oppression. When Jesus came and started to speak about “the Kingdom of God” all those resentments, now focused acutely on Rome, bubbled up to the surface.

But was Isaiah speaking to political and military action? Well, yes and no (always glad to provide solid help). The words Jesus read in the synagogue were proclaimed by Isaiah to a people who had already been carried off to captivity and exile in Babylon. He was announcing the release from that oppression — of course that had political and military implications and repercussions! But it was primarily proclaiming that, despite appearances, God was still in charge. The real oppression that befalls people is the oppression of the loss of hope.

***“He has sent me . . . to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”***

Lest we get too hung up on the word “year” here, let’s make sure we understand that neither Jesus nor Isaiah is limiting the Lord’s favor to a specific twelve-month period. Some scholars think that Isaiah had in mind what was called a “Jubilee Year,” mentioned in Leviticus 25; every fifty years all debts were cancelled out, family and tribal lands restored, and in essence what was said to the entire nation of Israel, *“Start anew.”* (I find myself rankling every time I see one of those ads for the company where the clients say, *“I owed the IRS \$46,000, but I only had to pay them \$1,200.”* Gee, I wonder how the government made up for that discrepancy?)

What Jesus is speaking to is something more akin to what the Greeks called *καιρος* (kairos) — a concept of time, not measured by clocks or calendars, but measured by its impact. We roll that concept into our language when we say things like, *“His time had not yet come,”* or *“I’ll get to it in good time.”* The “year of the Lord’s favor” is a season of

blessing, marked apparently by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . .”***

Last Sunday we heard St. Paul begin to address to the church in Corinth the issue of the work of the Holy Spirit. The primary work, Paul insisted, was the working of faith: “. . . ***no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Let Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.***” That’s where it begins, but it is by no means where it ends.

Paul goes on to discuss the variety of ways that the Spirit works in the life of the Church; the nature and multiplication of various gifts the Spirit bestows on individuals, emphasizing that ***“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*** He then outlined ways by which those gifts equip those gifted for ministry. He picks up on that theme in today’s Second Lesson, affirming that not everyone has all the gifts, but we need to be clear that the person with gift “A” is not better nor worse than the person with gift “R.” Using the image of our own bodies, Paul emphasizes that hands are not better than feet, nor feet more lofty than ears. What Paul is really arguing is that a body where the toe is supreme is a freak, so any collection of Christians where a single gift was honored above any other gift would be equally freakish.

Paul had to address these issues because, in the church in Corinth, various factions had arisen, a fact that was threatening the very survival of that congregation. Here was a congregation endowed with an abundance of spiritual gifts, but they were at each other’s throats over an abundance of piffle. This is what happens when spiritual gifts are taken to be personal gifts.

***“A body isn’t really a body, unless there is more than one part,”*** Paul insists. So likewise, the church cannot be the Body of Christ if we all look at act the same. John Ortberg writes in Leadership: “[God] knows just what each person needs.

*He had Abraham take a walk,*

*Elijah take a nap,  
Joshua take a lap,  
Adam take the rap.  
He gave Moses a 40-year timeout,  
He gave David a harp and a dance,  
He gave Paul and pen and a scroll.  
He wrestled with Jacob,  
argued with Job,  
whispered to Elijah,  
warned Cain,  
and comforted Hagar.  
Her gave Aaron an altar,  
Miriam a song,  
Peter a name,  
and Elisha a mantle.*

*Jesus was stern with the rich young ruler,  
tender with the woman caught in adultery,  
patient with the disciples,  
blistering with the scribes,  
gentle with the children,  
and gracious with the thief on the cross.*

*God never grows two people the exact same way. God is a hand-crafter, not a mass-producer.”*

Which raises the question: “*How is God hand-crafting you?*” Or to say it another way: “*How are you getting into position so that you can experience what God wants your to experience, and receive from God what He wants to give you?*” There are many spiritual exercises we can employ and spiritual disciplines to which we can surrender that will help us become more open to the working of the Holy Spirit. Which ones will work best for you? Maybe you need to try some on to see how they fit.

New idea: You haven’t heard this from before today because it just came to me this morning: I will put together a series of classes on these

spiritual exercises and disciplines and offer a six-to-ten-week course on them. I have no starting date or day of the week, or time . . . hey! I don't even know what the content will be. But look for it in the next few weeks. That is my way of trying to help you grow into a posture where you can with great boldness and confidence proclaim with Isaiah and Jesus: ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . .”***

If you question that in your life, you need to spend some time opening yourself up to a deeper sense of the Spirit. If you already can affirm that with joy and fervor, you may need to tailor whatever you've been doing so that more will come. Because the Spirit is given . . . and gives gifts . . . because there are still many who are poor in need of good news, captive in need of release, blind who need sight, oppressed seeking freedom, and all who need to know God's favor.

*“Spirit, come . . . be on me.”*

Amen.