

Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah words of good news...good news for the poor, the oppressed, the imprisoned, the blind. Then he said today this prophecy is fulfilled.

Jesus is saying, hey it's me. I'm the fulfillment. I'm God's Messiah come into the world to launch God's reign.

It's also the day another prophecy has been fulfilled. When Jesus was presented to the Temple at 8 days of age, his family was met by the prophet Simeon.

Simeon said this:

my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the gentiles

and for glory to your people Israel."

OK, that sounds pretty good. Salvation can be understood as relief for the poor, the oppressed, the prisoners, the blind. Salvation is the reign of God, begun now and extending to eternity.

But Simeon didn't stop there. He said to Mary, This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed <sup>35</sup> so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed.

So that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed. The second part of today's story shows just that.

The people of Nazareth are at first amazed and impressed by Jesus' teaching. Luke tells us up to now that's been true of all his teaching.

But the sermon in Nazareth takes a turn. It's a sermon that becomes an omen to later events in Jesus' life. On this Reformation Sunday, the story creates a pretty clear image of themes like gospel and grace and faith. Those are the things Martin Luther hung his hat on.

The first part of Jesus' teaching here is pure grace. Jesus comes to bring good news. And that good news does something. It announces the kingdom of God. It announces a way of life and a worldview that is beginning. It's a way of life that is sharply contrasted to the imperial worldview.

Jesus uses the word today...today Isaiah's words are fulfilled. Not tomorrow. Not in some far away and future heaven. Today.

The good news begins today. For poor people that means a worldview that has to include not just charity, but an end to the systems that keep poor people poor.

It means release for captives. Sight to the blind. Freedom to the oppressed. As the kingdom of God arrives and begins to unfold, our world will change.

The year of the Lord's favor could mean a couple of things. The laws in Leviticus included the practice of Jubilee.

It was a year every 50 years when all debt was to be forgiven. Prisoners were to be set free and slaves released. Land was to be returned to its original owners and fields allowed to lie fallow, to rest. It was to be a year of radical grace, forgiveness, freedom. A kind of reset for everyone.

It's not historically clear that this was ever actually practiced. Radical grace is always a hard sell to those worried about giving something up.

The year of the Lord's favor might have also been a way to say the year of the beginning of God's reign. No less radical and although it also sounds good, actually living into it is difficult. Because grace, as much as we might like the word, is a hard sell.

Luke likely meant all of this quite literally. We who are not poor, or oppressed, or blind, or in prison might wonder how this is good news to us. We tend to experience them more as metaphors.

Sometimes our poverty is a more spiritual poverty...a poverty of hope and generosity maybe. We may be oppressed by our own egos or by the general ugliness of the world.

We can be spiritually blind. We are captive to sin, not just ours but that of others. Jesus' words are good news for us too.

This grace and freedom is for everyone and we can rejoice daily that Christ has granted us that grace and freedom.

But the end result of actually grasping that grace for ourselves has to impact our approach to others, or we haven't really grasped it.

Because grace is also literal – God's kingdom is a world where prisoners are literally set free, where the poor have what they need, where healing and freedom are the norm.

And that's sometimes where our inner thoughts are revealed. The people in Nazareth listening to Jesus could hear the first part as good news. Even if they weren't really poor or in prison or blind – or really didn't even see themselves as oppressed, they weren't likely the people in

power or the wealthy. They could agree that a world shaped by the good news of Jesus would be better for their community.

But then things turn. In Luke's version of the story, Jesus seems to intentionally provoke them. That's different from Mark and Matthew, although the end result is the same.

At the heart is Jesus' proclamation that not only does God's grace extend to people outside the Jewish community, sometimes it may even go preferentially to the non-Jews.

Their reaction speaks to human nature across the millennia – humans do not want to see someone get something they might not. And they can have strong ideas about who deserves grace.

The crowd is furious when Jesus lifts up a non-Jewish widow who received God's grace over Jewish ones.

Same when Jesus points out the healing of Naaman – Naaman, who not only didn't believe but was kind of a jerk to Elisha.

But here's the key point. When we truly grasp God's grace for us, we are genuinely happy for others to also receive grace.

Again, it's easy to say we would be – but sometimes our actions speak otherwise. When we truly grasp God's grace for us, and receive the good news of God's kingdom, here and now, we can't help but extend to others that same grace.

To say God's grace is for everyone is to say it extends to undocumented immigrants and people on government assistance.

It means Republicans or Democrats, whichever you think are underserving of grace.

It means criminals and those up to their eyeballs in debt. It means powerful leaders who have abused their power.

It means gay and straight, black and brown and white. It means the rich as well as the poor. It means the greedy and mean and selfish and self-righteous.

God's grace is for everyone and I guarantee if I keep going, I'll hit on a group you think doesn't deserve it. We begin to grasp that grace...is not fair. It seems to give people freedom we don't think they've earned. But then, have we?

Here's the thing – God's grace, truly grasped, changes people. To say that God's grace changes people and builds God's kingdom is to say that grace can truly change anyone.

When we truly walk in God's grace, we want grace for others. And we're willing to find ways to make it happen. And with God's guidance, we can begin to bring our world more in line with God's kingdom.

And that does mean literal good news to the poor and the blind and the prisoners and the oppressed. A good measure of how convinced we are of God's grace toward us is how we feel about that.

But, regardless how we feel, Jesus brings good news to all of us. In Christ we are set free from those things that keep us bound up.

One of Luther's key points was that we can't get there on our own. We don't work our way into the kingdom. It's Jesus who gets us there.

Today, Jesus said. Today we hear that same word...today Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled for us. The word we hear today creates and nurtures in us... the faith that enables us to embrace the crazy idea that God's grace really is good news for everyone.