

“The Proclamation”
Luke 4:14-30
February 3, 2019

I don't know about you, but I've already begun to lose track of how many candidates have already declared for the Democratic presidential nomination. Only a few years ago, the shoe was on the other foot, with so many Republicans running that they couldn't even put them all on a single stage for presidential debates. Maybe we Congregationalists had the right idea when we decided that, in choosing a pastor, we would be presented with only one choice, and the congregation would vote either Yea or Nay. It's a system that even Vladimir Putin would be envious of.

The latest declared presidential candidate for the 2020 election is from California; as a New Englander, my wife isn't really sure anything west of the Hudson River really counts as part of the United States. Being a Chicagoan, I'm willing to grant that, up to the Rocky Mountains, it's still America - but after that, well, I'll reserve judgment. But at least Senator Harris declared the old-fashioned way, a recognizably American way, with a news conference and a traditional rally.

Long ago there was no news conference in Nazareth when another type of announcement was being made, even though on the surface it might have sounded not too different from a declaration of candidacy - although Jesus didn't offer to sit down and have a beer with us, like Elizabeth Warren did on her Youtube announcement when she said *she* wanted to be our next president. No, Jesus wasn't running for office, and his offer to sit down and have some wine with his followers came in the context of a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and not when he informed the congregation at his home-town synagogue that he was, if not God incarnate, at least God's chosen instrument. That day in the synagogue, Jesus preached against the rich and powerful special interests, saying God loves us all, not just the 1%, declaring that he had a vision of freedom, justice, and peace for everyone. Sounds like some sort of declaration to me.

This non-political campaign of Christ, launched in his place of worship, clearly had political implications - and not just when he spoke of rendering unto Caesar what was Caesar's, or when he referred to King Herod as 'that wily fox.' You couldn't really blame some of his listeners for thinking that maybe Jesus was indeed presenting himself as an alternative king ... for in a sense, he was - but not in a way that they understood.

Like Senator Harris earlier this week at her California rally, Jesus sought to stir up the faithful. As the result shows in today's Gospel lesson, this occasionally doesn't make for good politics. So when Jesus taught in verses 26 and 27 of what is now the fourth chapter of Luke that salvation was not just for people who attended synagogue but also for Gentiles, well, you might be able to understand why some of the faithful synagogue attenders got upset, because they believed that good things were reserved for people who thought just like they did. It was sort of like Barry Goldwater going to Florida in 1964 to speak to old age groups about the evils of the Social Security system. Barry may have had a point, but it somehow got lost in the brou-ha-ha of the moment. And in the half century since, Democrats are always ready to remind people of my age group that Republicans think Social Security and Medicare are evil - just as I'm about to start accessing my first Medicare benefits.

No, Jesus didn't have that political knack of telling the crowds just what they wanted to hear. Candidates often tell farmers one thing, suburbanites something a bit different, and by the time they get to the city center, you'd think there were entirely different versions of Truth to be heard. No wonder people talk about Fake News and Alternative Facts. Modern communications, of course, limit this a bit now, but politicians still tell people what they would like to hear, by and large ... which is not what the people might *need* to hear.

But this is exactly what Jesus provides: just as he provoked the people of his day in Galilee and all Israel to consider the notion that God just might love everybody, even those people whom we might not find too lovable because on some level we disagree

with them, so too does Jesus provoke us to look at things in a new light, from a different perspective, in the fresh winds of the Spirit that blows away all the dust and the cobwebs of those comfy cocoons we have enveloped ourselves in. His proclamation is a rallying cry - not to arms, not to political warfare, and not even to partisanship - but to the Good News - Good News for people who are not satisfied with the way things are. He offers joy to people who feel they make no difference, who have lost all sense of meaning in and for their lives in the belief that nobody really cares about them. He gives liberation to those who feel they are stuck in a rut, either of daily routine thoughtlessly churned out, or in a rut of thinking that change, for them, is impossible due to being trapped in a life that just doesn't work for them anymore - if it ever really did. Jesus presents a vision for ones who may be so absorbed in their own private vistas that they've lost sight of the grand design. No doubt you've heard of people like that, who think they're so important because the world, to them, is quite limited, and they themselves are at the center of it all ... and the only thing they can see, in any direction - north, south, east, or west - is themselves.

Now politicians, when they make their announcements "on the air," make sure that they have supporters, literally or figuratively, standing beside them - unions, businesses, citizens' groups, lobbyists, donors, political allies, whoever. They proclaim that the values they stand for are in short supply, but in high demand - and that they stand prepared to render solutions to what ails us as a people. Yet Jesus had only a handful of followers and supporters at the ready. But believing that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, what else did Christ need? For the campaign in which Jesus was involved does not, in the end, depend upon human effort for its final success and vindication, because Jesus labors to remind us that God himself is the focus of what he does and why he gathers his disciples together as a people. In other words, this is not all about us, about you or me - it's about the One who created all that there was, is, or ever will be.

Indeed, the kingdom for which Christ and his disciples work is not yet of this world, and the Gospel which Christ and his disciples preach is more than mere propositions to be enacted after hearings and a vote. As we learned last week, the building blocks of the kingdom are found in the proclamation that God mends the broken, frees the captive, gives sight to the blind, comforting those who mourn, strengthening the faint, and granting life. And the tools which Jesus and his disciples use to achieve those ends are love, sacrifice, kindness, wisdom, justice, empathy, courage, humility, diligence, righteousness, benevolence, patience, equanimity, and selflessness. For Jesus and his disciples seek not their own gain, but the increase of the Father's kingdom, for at our best we are devoted to bringing the glories of heaven here into this world that God created.

Come, therefore - let us nourish ourselves at this table for the tasks set before us. Christ has so much for us to do, while promising that, in the end, triumph is assured.

Let us pray: