

Note – the current edition of Geez Magazine (Winter 2022) is about Jubilee, which is the Biblical Concept at the Core of this Week's reading and reflection. There is a lot of compelling and interesting things in this publication.

Check it out here...

<https://geezmagazine.org/magazine/issue/geez-63>

Interested in a copy? You can order online, or let us know!

You can read a few articles for free online...

<https://geezmagazine.org/magazine/article/thinking-abolition-theologically-an-interview-with-hannah-bowman>

Jesus' first sermon in his hometown synagogue is not received well at all

The text we have heard this morning from the Gospel of Luke is unique to that writing

There is a moment in Mark in which Jesus preaches in the synagogue of Nazareth

And there is both amazement and consternation from the crowd

But it is placed much later in the narrative than this

Matthew doesn't make much of time spent in Nazareth at the beginning of Jesus' ministry at all

But here in Luke, we get this extended episode

Jesus comes into the synagogue on the sabbath day

It's worth remembering that Luke is likely written last of the three Gospels

of Matthew, Mark, and Luke

And it is almost certainly written after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem

This means that by the time the story is written

Synagogues are much more central to worshipping life of the Jewish Community

Than they had been only a few generations earlier

This particular Synagogue is in Nazareth, the town in which Jesus has grown up

In the narrative he has left for a short while

First to be baptized by John the Baptizer

And then spending time in the wilderness

A narrative that we come to at the beginning of the Season of Lent (early March)

The narrative doesn't give an exact timeline, just an order of events

So it's hard to get a sense of how long we're meant to picture here between Jesus' departure

Into the wilderness to meet with John and this moment here

The text suggests that after his baptism, his time in the wilderness is at least 40 days

And then he returns to Galilee, the Region

And he begins to teach in various synagogues, enough that the text suggests,

and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

Now just a quick note, all of this is not an attempt to reconstruct a literal sense of the life of Yeshua ben Myriam.

Because we know, and we can acknowledge that the texts are constructs

They are taking memories and stories and teachings and putting them together

To carry across particular meanings

This is why I often employ the phrase

Luke's telling of the Jesus story

In doing this, we're trying to get a sense of what how the writers and readers of this text

Are grappling with this subject, and what it calls them to

In their time and place

That we might do the same in our own.

So, after some time away in which significant events occur

Jesus returns to his childhood hometown

And perhaps we might imagine him having returned drastically changed

Shaped by the wilderness experiences
Clearer about his sense of self and vocation
Than ever before
Yet perhaps those who receive him
Expect the person they have always known
Or may have challenge viewing him any different than they always have
Apparently people in the surrounding country are talking with some interest about him
And his teaching
It's conceivable that these reports have reached Nazareth as well
So maybe there is indeed some anticipation
There is much of interest in their upon which we might reflect
How we can encounter something and feel so changed
Yet those closest to us may not recognize it in us
May continue to expect us to be the version of ourselves that they have always known
Sometimes returning to old contexts finds us reverting to old roles and patterns
Which perhaps no longer feel fitting to who we now understand ourselves to be
So there's some ripe stuff here for consideration
Then Jesus takes the scroll and reads
Last week I spoke a bit about Lectionary
Appointed texts to be read in Churches on specific days
This is a practice, like so many others
That Christianity kept as it evolved from a sect within Judaism
To a distinct religious movement of its own
So, we might ponder then
Does Jesus time his visit knowing that this is the appointed text to be read on this day?

Does the gathered community begin to get a sense in his doing so as to why he chosen this particular sabbath to return?

Does he divert from the appointed text for the day?

Is the interest of the community piqued when they recognize that he has, for lack of a better phrase, gone off script?

However we imagine this moment

The text Jesus reads

The text that Luke's story invites readers to associate with Jesus and his ministry

Is a big one

It's from the prophet Isaiah

*'The Spirit of God is upon me,
because God has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
God 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 God's favour.'*

We read *Spirit of God*

Ruach Adonai YHWH

YHWH being the name of G-D

Not the word God, that is Adonai

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, founder and director of the Shalom Centre

a Jewish and multi-faith community with an increasing focus

on an exodus from fossil fuel economies in response to catastrophic climate change,

writes of this passage that we might best render YHWH, not as KING or LORD as is often done,

but as *Breath* or *Breath of Life*

recognizing that YHWH is written in Hebrew as 4 consonants

Which when pronounced without the vowels that are often added in

It sounds like breath

Yod

He

Va

He

This is doubly interesting because ruach, which we render here as spirit

Is the Hebrew word for breath

And this Divine breath has been bestowed to bring forth proclamation, another physical act of breath and body and lungs

- Good news for the poor
- Release for the Captive
- Sight for the blind
- Freedom for the oppressed

And then this phrase

To proclaim the year of God's favour

Now this is a key phrase to understand how Luke is framing Jesus' ministry

This is a very Jewish phrasing

The year of God's favour

Refers to the Jewish concept *Yovel*

Which we render in English as Jubilee

Though Rabbi Waskow recommends "Home-bringing"

The year of Jubilee, the Yovel, the Home-bringing is on its surface a land use policy

In Torah, every seventh-year is a Sabbath year, the land is meant to lie uncultivated,

but what grows naturally may be eaten

But not just by those who own a particular parcel of land

But by anyone

Including the foreigner

(BTW, those lines Jesus mentions just before the crowd gets angry, their also about foreigners)

The land rejuvenates

But in the seventh of seven cycles

The 50th year is Jubilee, the Yovel, the Home-bringing,

not only is the cultivation of land paused,

But debts are forgiven and the most common way of paying off debt in the ancient world

Is through indentured servitude

Families who have lost their land to wealthy owners through default

Are allowed to return

This is especially important recognizing that land is in the agrarian Mediterranean

The source of wealth

So Torah has built in a check and balance

To prevent the generational accumulation of wealth

And the generational passing down of poverty

Undermining acquisition and accumulation

Solidifying solidarity

Home-Bringing offers this fascinating lens to understand this in ways that Jubilee just doesn't

Jubilee is of course where we get jubilation – exuberant joyfulness

Which is fitting in response

But Home-bringing puts it in the realm of justice

This is not just about benevolence in forgiving debt or generosity

It is about a return to the way things were supposed to be all along

Interestingly, just as YHWH is understood as given a form to the sound of breath

Yovel/ the Hebrew term here

Is understood to be a verbal rendering of the melody played on the Shofar,

The trumpet made of the horn of a ram

When the new year begins!

Some may be aware,

That while the Gregorian Calendar begins the new year on January 1

And calls this year 2022

Of the Common Era (a more pluralistic way of putting it than AD)

That this is not universally observed

And that Judaism operates on a lunarsolar calendar

In which this 5782

Which happens to be

While not a *Yovel*

A Shmita

A Sabbath

A seventh year

Kol Tzedek, a Reconstructionist Synagogue in West Philadelphia describes this on their website...

<https://www.kol-tzedek.org/shmita.html>

5782 kicks off a Shmita year, the seventh year of a seven year cycle. In the Torah, the Shmita year is a time to rest the land without laboring it, and for all members of a society to release and forgive debts, or be forgiven of their debts. It is a year of regeneration--making food available to everyone who needs it, helping to restore equity in the economy, decrease wealth disparity, and nourish the land for its long-term sustainability.

Part of their campaign this year is to purchase medical debt of people in their city.

Not sure you aware that one can do this.

They purchase the debt through a non-profit, and then forgive it.

Their goal was to raise \$25,000 USD

which would allow them to purchase and forgive \$2.5 million

They are currently at \$42,000 and \$4.2 million forgiven!

Quaker, teacher Kristina Keefe-Perry,

In her article "Why I'm not a Pacifist"

<https://www.friendsjournal.org/why-im-not-a-pacifist/>

When I think of “pacifist” I think that the word is too small to hold what I would like to mean and not sure what the word is so I’m going to try and work it out. “Pacifist” implies someone who denies or abhors or negates the use of physical violence and war—which I do—but it doesn’t in my mind open up the truly revolutionary possibilities that are implied in peacemaking and especially in faithful peacemaking and more specifically, for me, in Christian peacemaking.

There’s some word—maybe it’s reconciliation—to describe Jesus’s ministry which he ministers to the pain and suffering not just of those affected by violence but by poverty and greed, other forms of violence that aren’t the physical violence implied by war which then gets me to pacifism.

So maybe, I was thinking about this, maybe I’m a “Shalomist”: someone who believes in God’s shalom, God’s peace and abundance for all... that God wills that everyone has abundance and peace and is doing what they are supposed to be doing.

Or maybe I’m a “Jubilee-ist,” who believes that we can work to a time when we have dismantled human structures and institutions as we’re invited to by the description of the Jubilee year to lay down all contracts, to let the slaves go, to let the land lie fallow, to return all of the landholdings to their original owners, like a big cosmic reset button of possibility of an acknowledgment that there is provision. There is enough.

There is enough

This is at the core of Yobvel

Of Home-brining

A deeply held belief that the right state of the world

Is sufficiency

That scarcity is a myth

That holds us in its grip

That manifests in inequality

Torah institutionalizes and legislates a check and balance against this

Kol Tzedek community seeks to creatively practice this

Keefe-Perry invites us to internalize this and seek to see the world in which we live

Begin to reflect this principle

I wonder where this hits you today?

What questions it raises?

What possibilities it provokes?

Where it potentially disturbs?

I wonder if you too,

Like Kristina Keefe-Perry,

Might be a Jubilee-ist?

Let's explore that possibility together...