

“Jesus and the Jubilee”

Luke 4:14-30

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Jubilee begins with the sounding of the trumpet. Jubilee is a celebration, a joyful celebration. Jubilee is good news. This morning our journey through Jubilee brings us to Jesus. Of all the gospels, Luke captures best the shared connection between Jesus and the Jubilee. I can think of no better way to convey the joy of Jubilee that is embodied in the life of Jesus than to connect his life to music. Words, when accompanied by a memorable tune, can stick in your mind and make a lasting impact.

Last Sunday we had a wonderful reminder of how influential music and songs can be. We celebrated Reformation Sunday. We broke out our plaids and kilts and remembered a time of transformation when the Protestant Church embraced the good news that it is by grace we have been saved, not by our works. At the center of the Reformation was Martin Luther. Luther wrote numerous books and countless sermons. Scholars steeped in Luther could point to his great theological writings. However, most folks, most ordinary folks, probably could not name the title of even one of Luther's sermons or books. But take Luther's words and connect them to music, and now a deep and lasting connection is formed. Such as when Luther wrote the hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” It was a letdown last Sunday when we could only hum along to Luther's soaring hymn. Not only are the words filled with meaning Martin Luther also tapped into a memorable tune. Legend has it that Luther borrowed an old bar tune, a tune familiar to the common people, and used that tune when he wrote the words. That tale might well be apocryphal, but for today I am going to treat it as gospel. Soaring words and a memorable tune work together to make a lasting impact.

If the legend is true and Luther knew the local tunes from the pub, I thought I could try my hand at setting stories of faith to tunes that captivate my heart. Perhaps unfortunately for you this morning, my favorite tunes are from the 60s. You should hear me sing along to my oldies station as Phlash Phelps counts down the favorites, like Miss Ronnie Specter singing, “Be my baby...” or the Angels proclaiming, “My boyfriend's back he's gonna save my reputation...if I was you I'd take a permanent vacation...”. Some of the 60s songs do the very thing I'm talking about, borrowing a favorite melody to serve a new purpose. The Beach Boys took Chuck Berry's sweet little sixteen and turned it into, “Surfin' USA.” The Crystal's struck gold with the Do Run Run, and then David Cassidy's little brother Shawn set hearts aflame a decade later with his own cover of that classic. You should hear me sing along...or maybe by the time I'm done today you will be glad you don't have sit with me in my car as I sing along.

I have always been fascinated with the story of the Exodus, the plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the manna in the wilderness. Somebody took that foundational story of deliverance and set it to the tune of “Louie, Louie”. That was a deft move, because no one can understand the words to Louie, Louie anyway. You never saw teenagers take that Exodus story to heart like when some enthusiastic youth leaders started strumming their guitars.

“Pharaoh, Pharaoh, O baby let my people go...yeah yeah yeah”. It sticks in your mind.

I tried my hand at this once. We were on a trip to the Holy Land. We were staying in Jerusalem, and one of the highlights of our travels was a day trip to see where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, an area known as Qumran. It was an unforgettable experience. Hoping to seal that day in my memory vault I did my own cover of the Crystal's The Do Run Run.

**“We went there on a Sunday and we climbed those hills...the Qumran ran ran, the Qumran ran ran
Somebody told us that those caves were filled, the Qumran ran ran, the Qumran ran ran
Yeah, we climbed those hills....yeah those caves were filled...and when we saw the Scrolls,
the Qumran ran ran, the Qumran ran ran.”**

Because I love the Jubilee and all the hopes it holds for righteous living, and because I love Jesus and how his life embodied all that is good about Jubilee, I have been thinking about this passage from Luke 4 and how absolutely awesome and amazing it must have been when Jesus walked in the room. “He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.” The other gospels tell us he went to the synagogue on a regular basis. In Luke’s account, Jesus not only attends synagogue, Jesus preaches in the synagogue. That day in Nazareth, Jesus stood up to read. Whether he asked for or was simply handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, Jesus unrolled that sacred scroll and found the place where it is written,

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

The room was charged with energy and anticipation. The year of the Lord’s favor is often linked with the Jubilee, that 50th year when good news was preached to the poor, when prisoners were set free, when oppression was sent packing and justice reigned. Having read of the promised year of the Lord, Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Boom! Today this scripture is fulfilled. The long years of waiting and hoping had met their fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. The crowd responded with an overwhelming show of support. All spoke well of him. That is what happened that day at the synagogue in Nazareth when Jesus walked in the room.

The ingredients are all here, then for a song of celebration. There is a love song from the sixties by Jackie DeShannon. Singing about her special one, Jackie describes the feeling that fills her heart, “Every time that you....walk in the room.” What rhymes with room? How about the voice from heaven that made the thunder boom when God said about Jesus, “This is my Son whom I love. With him I am well-pleased.” Jackie sang, “Trumpets sound and I hear thunder boom...every time that you....walk in the room.” The trumpets of Jubilee, the voice of God that booms with affection and affirmation for Jesus, and this unique episode in the life of Jesus that Luke captures so perfectly, the year of the Lord’s favor, well...

**They could feel a new experience of God’s grace
They knew something amazing was taking place
Trumpets sound and they heard thunder boom...every time Jesus....walked in the room**

**The lame, the leper and the blind man felt such shame
Jesus gave them love instead of blame
His healing touch brought joy where there was gloom
Every time Jesus...walked in the room**

A woman with an awful past came off the street

**With tears and a costly ointment she bathed his feet
His words of grace were sweeter than perfume
The love of Jesus saved her...right in that room**

Friends, I do not apologize for getting giddy and having fun and celebrating the life and the love of Jesus. I do not apologize for loving the oldies. You see, this story of Jesus walking in the room, of Jesus entering the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, reveals that Jesus also loves the oldies. In his case the oldies were really old. When he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, he was given a text that was 500-700 years old. What does a text from that long ago have to do with us today? You could imagine some people would ask that question. Not Jesus. Jesus knew the oldies. Maybe he was assigned the reading, the passage from Isaiah 61. Maybe. And maybe he chose that very passage to signal that his arrival itself was good news. The angels in Luke had already announced to the shepherds that with the birth of Jesus they brought “good news of great joy that will be for all people.” His mother Mary held out high hopes for what her baby boy would bring, a radical change to this broken world, change where God would “bring down rulers from their thrones and lift up the humble...where God would fill the hungry with good things but send the rich away empty.” Things had got out of balance...like in those fifty years leading up to the Jubilee. Instead of ignoring the injustice, God was entering the world, through his Beloved Son Jesus Christ, to set things right. Good news to the poor, freedom for captives, recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed...and don’t miss the significance, the Jubilee significance...to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. “We hear trumpets sound and thunder boom...every time Jesus walks in the room.”

Jubilee is about loving your neighbor. No other gospel gives a more compelling example of loving your neighbor than Luke, whose parable of the Good Samaritan has led to so many acts of kindness and caring for the other, for the wounded, for the least, for the last, and for the lost. Jubilee is about returning home. No other gospel gives a more heartwarming example of returning home than Luke, whose parable of the Prodigal Son calls all of us to rejoice with Jesus, for that which was lost has been found.

**With greed he grabbed his inheritance and on his father, he turned his back
Gratitude and humility was something that young son lacked
With a broken heart he came home to face his doom
But the father’s arms of love said...there is room**

Friends, I do not apologize for getting giddy and having fun celebrating the life and love of Jesus. I want to be part of the celebration. I want to be front and center when the trumpets sound and we hear thunder boom...I want to be there cheering for Jesus “every time that he...walks in the room.”

And yet Jubilee is not all celebration. Last week we noted that the Year of Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement. In each of the gospels Jesus points to his suffering and death. It is hard to associate suffering and death with Jubilee, but it is the suffering and death of Jesus that atones for our sin. Suffering and death are part of Jubilee. Suffering and death create an unbreakable bond between Jesus and the Jubilee. Jesus knew his oldies. From the same section of the prophet Isaiah that speaks of the year of the Lord’s favor there is a series of passages that speak about a servant who comes to save the people. The way the servant will save the people is different from anything we might expect. The servant will save the people through his suffering. Again, unique to Luke is the passage in chapter nine where we are told Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. As much as it breaks our heart to know what awaits him in Jerusalem, his death and resurrection

become the means by which God saves us. We are saved by the Suffering Servant. That God loved us enough to live with us...and to die for us...that is the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**He died on the cross and the whole world fell apart
Some women gathered at the tomb with heavy and broken hearts
But with a trumpet sound and a thundering boom
Jesus Christ was raised...out of that tomb
Now there's no more sadness no more gloom
Jesus Christ was raised...out of that tomb
Death is gone and new life starts to bloom
Every time Jesus...walks in the room...Jesus is Christ is with us...right in this room...right in this room...right in this room.**

Now if you are not a fan of the oldies, of the 60s...I understand and respect that. But I don't want you to forget that Jesus is in this room...in this very room. So here is another song about Jesus being in this room...in this very room. As you hear these words, prepare your hearts to come to this table, this table that proclaims the great and good news that Jesus is alive, and Jesus is with us now, in this very room.

In this very room there's quite enough love for one like me,
And in this very room there's quite enough joy for one like me,
And there's quite enough hope and quite enough power to chase away any gloom,
For Jesus, Lord Jesus ... is in this very room.
And in this very room there's quite enough love for all of us,
And in this very room there's quite enough joy for all of us,
And there's quite enough hope and quite enough power to chase away any gloom,
For Jesus, Lord Jesus ... is in this very room. (The Heritage Singers)