

Sermon Outline - Sun, Jan 16, 2021 - Vision in the Meantime
Luke 3:1-20

Overview: Welcome to the 3rd Sunday of Vision Month at New Roots. We been looking at the life of John the Baptist a prophet who had a vision of Jesus' coming far before anyone else. Or working title is Vision in the Meantime.

Exegesis –

- The passage begins by reminding us who was in power – Tiberius – reluctant emperor, did okay but had trouble getting along with folks and was a bit paranoid
- Governor Pontius Pilate, whose name will become famous for his role in Jesus death – Gospels give him grace but his reign ends because he brutally crushes a Samaritan revolt
- Herod – (there are a bunch of them) this one is Antipas – Overall hot mess best known for divorcing his wife to marry his brother's wife. He will kill John.
- Annas – High priest deposed by Rome, sons get in but within three years they both are out and his son-in-law Caiaphas ends up in charge (for 18 yrs- longest of any high priest) – he oversees Sanhedrin trial of Jesus
- Reminder that John is in mean times where the powerful are crushing the people

The Key Points – How does John learn to wait?

1. John gets away from it all – Go to the wilderness (Moses as exemplar) where God reigns
2. He remembers God's promises – From the prophet Isaiah
3. Inspires the people to build a movement – He gives a clear and inspiring message and talks with them, gives them specific actions they can take to join, and engages in ritual to cement their commitment to God and each other

For this he ends up in jail!

And so to understand John's motivation we turn to the words of that 20th Century prophet, whose birthday we celebrate this weekend. A man not afraid to speak truth to power, to call the people to courage in the midst of mean times. He too found himself in jail for his work and in response to the calls of the white religious establishment to back down he penned these words. –

"Just as the eighth-century prophets left their little villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their hometowns; and just as the Apostle Paul left his little village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to practically every hamlet and city of the Greco-Roman world, I too am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my particular hometown.

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider.

You may well ask, "Why direct action, why sit-ins, marches, and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are exactly right in your call for negotiation. Indeed, this is the purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has consistently refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.

The contemporary church is so often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch supporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's often vocal sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If the church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. I meet young people every day whose disappointment with the church has risen to outright disgust.

I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future. I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are presently misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with the destiny of America. Before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before the pen of Jefferson scratched across the pages of history the majestic word of the Declaration of Independence, we were here. For more than two centuries our foreparents labored here without wages; they made cotton king; and they built the homes of their masters in the midst of brutal injustice and shameful humiliation -- and yet out of a bottomless vitality our people continue to thrive and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands."

The Spirit of John was alive in Dr. King who believed that despite the strangling grip of Jim Crow, God had not abandoned him in mean times. He used the reality of the times to connect with God's vision and push the people to act. The call on John and Dr. King is also the call to us -- to in the face of oppressive powers -- find God in wild places, remember the promise and build a movement in the communities where God has placed us.

Questions

1. In these mean times what space have you cultivated to get away so that your heart gets some respite from the realities of the world? What daily, weekly, monthly or yearly practices create space for you to breathe deeply and commune with the Holy Spirit?
2. How can you consistently being reminded of God's promises to you and to your community? How can you incorporate them into your daily living? Where can you write them down so you will see them or ensure that you will hear them regularly?
3. Where are you building movement? What steps are you taking to inspire and align with other folks around God's vision? (In your small group, at New Roots, with your family, in your neighborhood at school or at work?) What manageable commitments can you make towards movement building?