



Ravensworth

BAPTIST CHURCH

February 13, 2022 | Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year W

1 Kings 17:8-16, Luke 4:16-27

Excavating Our Roots: Liberating Abundance

Rev. Dr. Leah Grundset Davis, preaching

We were all given a gift last week when Mark and Caitlyn kicked off our stewardship worship season with two incredible reflections that wove together self-reflection, biblical reflection, and the call we share to excavate our roots for the sake of the world. This morning, Geneva shared of an upcoming event on March 1 where we continue that commitment as RBC to learning about where this land, the building, this community came from. I hope you'll join us for that in a few weeks. And as I said in the welcome, we have the chance to hear from Dr. Andrew Gardner as we discuss about our Baptist roots and from where we draw our strength and perhaps our weaknesses in tradition.

These roots help to define us, even when we don't know it.

Jesus knew his roots. His parents made sure of that and his community helped with his faith formation as he learned the words of the law and the prophets, and more about his own identity. Jesus was who he was because he knew from where he came.

And in all likelihood, because of who he was, he knew he'd never quite fit in again in his hometown of Nazareth because Jesus was starting to make people uncomfortable with all his talk about God's love for everyone, even though he was quoting from the law and prophets.

In Luke's fourth chapter, it's kind of hard to believe that it's Jesus' first big proclamation. Everything shifts now in the gospel of Luke. It's Jesus' announcement of who he is, of God's dreams for the world, proof that he listened to his mama, and it tells us exactly what kind of good news he was preaching. It's left to us to figure out for whom this is good news.

Jesus' big announcement came from Nazareth, his hometown. We can imagine his dad Joseph, or at least people who knew Joseph and Mary were in the synagogue that day. Maybe Joseph, the carpenter had constructed with love, the bimah that Jesus was about to step onto, to read the sacred words. Makes sense why Jesus might want to stand there—actually placing his body on a place that he knew had been handcrafted by one who loved him, one that rooted him to a sacred place.

That morning at the synagogue in Nazareth, family and friends gathered—ready to worship. They had heard what he had been up to—wandering around the wilderness, being baptized, starting to share some good news here and there.

Jesus entered the synagogue, as was his custom as a Jewish man, prepared for worship. Maybe he hugged some cousins and sat down. He looked around—remembering when he was too young to attend, and peeked in the window with his cousin John. He remembered all the people who had mentored him, the prayers he had learned, seated in this very spot.

When the time came, he got up, was handed the scroll from the much-beloved prophet Isaiah. Jesus knew Isaiah. And he found the place he probably knew deep down in his heart and he proclaimed:

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He 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 the Lord's favor.'*

Jesus rolled up the scroll, feet rooted in the sacred spot, looking out all his family and friends who had known him since he was born. Then, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down.

Once Jesus had sat down, he said, "Today...the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

And the people were amazed! They knew this was Joseph's son, but here he was quoting Isaiah and saying all the liberation in Isaiah was happening today! Right in their midst!

What Jesus has just announced is a pretty tall order. Jesus wasn't messing around. He was in the synagogue reading hard-hitting words from the Prophet Isaiah and his hometown friends were LOVING IT.

We love it too, don't we? I love those words from Luke 4- they give me hope that the world as it is is not always how the world will be. It is our promise that Jesus has come for all good reasons- for redemption and restoration.

This is the Jesus I love to talk about- he turned water in wine! He was called Beloved by God! He came to bring good news to the poor! He came to heal the sick and let the oppressed go free. And more than anything, he came to declare the year of the Lord's favor for all people.

And he announced that morning that it was happening among the people in that very moment—it wasn't a far off endeavor, or one that only happened back in Isaiah's time. Nope. Jesus was saying that this is God's ongoing work in the world—to bring about liberating abundance.

According to Jesus, this was for everyone. The liberation and the abundance and the relationship with God was for every single person. Did you catch who Jesus' referenced? He referenced the story John Baskin read earlier—Elijah was sent to the widow in Zarephath during a famine, sent to someone outside his hometown, outside of where people might expect him to show up.

This is what his hometown friends eventually got upset about as the passage continues. They thought because they had some claim to Jesus that he would perform some kind of miracles for them. But they are the ones who held the news from the prophet Isaiah all along. They held that truth, they were rooted in it. What did it matter that Jesus was going elsewhere to heal, to redeem, to love?

But it begs the question...who had told them that these promises of liberation were not happening today for them and everyone? What was holding them back from seeing that God was always at work and were daily realities for all people? Someone had told them that it wasn't happening today—that's the only reason this news from Jesus was so surprising.

It begs the question to us—who has told us that the moment of liberation is not today? Who has told us that our hopes and dreams are some far off

reality? Jesus is here saying no such thing. Jesus is here saying that there is justice for the oppressed and hope for the hopeless and release for the captive...is today. He is saying the possibilities of beloved community exist yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

During this season of stewardship, what does it mean for us to look back in our history and excavate our roots, even while positioning ourselves in a place that may or may not be receptive? What does it mean to know where we came from, to know that we are God's Beloveds, and to examine the times we just wanted Jesus to show up for us and not someone else down the street?

What does it mean for us to give of ourselves, our time, our resources to invest in a community of faith?

The good news, and there is plenty, is that this liberating abundance is the very essence of who Jesus is, of who we are called to be.

Proclaiming of good news to the poor, the liberation of the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, liberating those who are oppressed—that's the possibility of life following Christ the liberator!

Thanks be to God. Amen!