

Jubilee!
Luke 4:14-21

What do you want to do when the pandemic finally ends?

We continue our online worship services today. We have had to deal with this Covid-19 pandemic for two years now. Many experts predict that the pandemic will be endemic this year, meaning it would continue at a low level but not be a threat on its current scale. I also pray for this. Two years are more than enough. How would you feel if Dr. Anthony Fauci and the CDC officially announce the end of the Covid-19 pandemic? What do you want to do if the pandemic ends and you don't have to wear a mask anymore? I want to hug each one of you as we pass the peace! I also want to have a big pot luck party in our churchyard so that people in our neighborhood may celebrate the end of the pandemic with us. We will definitely need to celebrate our release from Covid-19 constraints.

Jesus' Proclamation of Jubilee

What Jesus has done in today's scripture, is to announce the Jubilee Year, The year of the Lord's favor. It's an announcement of good news. Ancient Israel had Jubilee laws. According to Jewish law, Jews needed to work the land for six years and then let it rest in the seventh. They called it Shmita, the "year of release" or the Sabbatical Year. The Jubilee year occurs every seventh Sabbath year, thus, every 50 years. On the Jubilee year, the land and people rested and all those who were in slavery were set free to return to their communities. So the Jubilee year is like a reset year.

God gave lands to each family of Israel when they entered the promised land. The Israelites believed that God was the owner of the land and the land, a symbol of God's faithfulness, so they could not sell it. However, as we all know, life does not always go as planned or hoped. Some people fail in their investments or meet misfortunes in life, and have no way but to give up the land they received. In such cases, people could sell their lands to relatives so that the land would not go to other tribes. Even after selling the land, some could not afford life and then, they became slaves. However, every fifty years, the Jubilee Year returned and it involved a year of release from indebtedness (Leviticus 25:23-38) and all types of bondage. "All prisoners and captives were set free, all slaves were released, all debts were forgiven, and all property was returned to its original owners." The theological meaning of Jubilee year is that God is the true owner of everything. Economically, Jubilee year is a kind of social reset, preventing the over-concentration of land and wealth in a few hands. God doesn't want those who have failed at some point in their lives to become perpetual losers.

From Pandemic to Endemic

Because of human greed and injustice, our world is far from perfect. The covid-19 pandemic has revealed this unjust world order in plain sight. Think of the past two years. How has it been? I don't want to experience this kind of pandemic again in the future, but the pandemic has made a financial fortune for a few people. According to an Oxfam report, the financial asset of 99 % of world population was decreased during the pandemic while the assets of the world's ten richest people have doubled. A one-time tax on their income during this period

could cover the cost of vaccines for the whole world population. COVID-19 mortality in poor countries is almost double that of rich countries. Inequality in the world and our society have been perpetuated for many centuries. In the United States, there are large achievement gaps between high-and low-income students. When raising your kids, you need to think about school districts and generally, good school districts mean expensive housing. The education gap creates a future income gap. God doesn't want this. Perhaps, that's why we need to hear Jesus' proclamation of the Jubilee year.

When he came to Nazareth, Jesus went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read from the book of Isaiah.

“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.”

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Then he said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” He didn't say, “one day this scripture will be fulfilled.” But he said, “TODAY this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” It meant that the history of Jubilee has been fulfilled in and through lives of those who fear God and acknowledge God as the true Master of their lives. When we think of the kingdom of God, we tend to assume that it is a kind of place we go after we die. However, Jesus said, “the kingdom of God is coming.” The kingdom of God is a time and place where God's rule of love is fully realized. As the kingdom of God is among us, the Jubilee year is fulfilled in and through us.

I don't know if you have heard of Rev. Gordon Cosby and the Church of the Saviour he founded in Washington D.C. Rev. Cosby enlisted as a chaplain during World War II and served in an infantry unit of 101st Airborne Division. He saw the brutality of war and became convinced of the futility of war. He also experienced how desperately people need a deeper experience of faith than most churches are structured to offer. “He promised God that if he survived the war he would dedicate himself to the pursuit of creating new structures and methods which he hoped would give the church greater integrity and help people enter the depths of discipleship and find the life that sustains.”¹ He started the Church of the Saviour in 1946. “From the beginning, church members sought to embody Christ in intentional ways, welcoming radical diversity and calling all to be ministers through the generous sacrifice of time, energy and resources.”² The integrity and accountability of members are essential, and thus discipleship is really key for this church. To be a full member of the church takes more than 3 years of spiritual training and commitment to Christ. Do you think that this kind of church can really thrive? The Church of the

¹ <https://inwardoutward.org/origins/>

² Ibid.

Savior never had more than 130 members but this church has done over 45 ministries. They run homeless shelters, recovery ministries, support children's education, and a homeless hospital. How much is the annual budget to run these ministries? More than twenty million dollars! Many church historians say the Church of the Savior became one of the most admired places of worship in the country. I don't intend to tell you how great their ministries are. I would like to tell though how the Jubilee year might look today. Size doesn't matter. 130 members who are committed to Christ bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed! The world still needs to hear this good news of Jubilee and we can be the messenger.

Reset Your Life!

John Wesley said, "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on Earth." I believe each one of us is called to be a messenger of the good news. To share this good news of Jubilee, first, we must experience the joy of Jubilee and reset our life in accordance with God's vision of Jubilee! Instead of living by market logic, we need to live by God's calling for us. Instead of chasing possessions, learn to live by a higher calling!

As I reflect on the meaning of Jubilee, I feel that the real reason God pushes the social reset button every fifty-years is not only for those who are less fortunate but also for all of us. God wants to give a second chance to those who fail. At the same time, God wants to give all of us a second chance "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8) 2020 was Asbury's 90th anniversary. It's already 2022. In 8 years, we will face our second Jubilee year. What will our Jubilee year look like? What kind of church do we want to be? I pray that Asbury UMC becomes a community of faithful disciples who bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and freedom to the oppressed. How is this possible? By making every year the Jubilee year! Act Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly with God. God will proclaim the Jubilee year through our beloved Asbury community. Amen.