

“Mic-Drop Jesus”

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Presbyterian Church in Leonia

Nehemiah 8:1-3,5-6, 8-10

Luke 4:14-21

When I began preaching class, my professor warned me about seminarians’ first sermons. She said that too often, a new preacher feels the need to lay everything on the table in one, thick sermon: understanding of sin and redemption, grasp on authority and inspiration in scripture, position on homosexuality, explanation of why bad things happen to good people- all while sticking to the lectionary text and throwing in a couple good jokes for good measure. She told us, “Don’t do that unless you think it really is the last time you’ll ever preach.”

So the first time I preached as a seminary intern, I prepared by spending hours and hours in the seminary library, reading commentaries trying to grasp the wisdom of the elders so I could preach deeply on one particular passage. I gave a very well-researched sermon, but it did not yet show my voice-- the particular way my experiences form a lens or language to see and tell God’s story.

The passage we read today in Luke shows Jesus giving his first sermon. In it, he reveals his voice. He does not need to go on and on about what he thinks about everything. In fact, he gave words that were brief, precise, and powerful-- so powerful that if he had spoken in today’s culture, it would have been a mic-drop moment-- a moment so impressive to those around that nothing else *needs* to be said.

I have not yet crafted a sermon so powerful that I could say what I need to say in under 75 words, drop the mic and walk away and leave people in amazement at my gracious words. I know you would be thrilled if I did, then we could all go to early lunch! But something I suspect is that my better sermons are not good because of all the wisdom I fill you with. My better sermons are good because they awaken or ignite something powerful that God has already set within *you*, so that you can connect with God’s story through *your* particular language and lens.

The truth is that Jesus’ first sermon was not his own original words. He simply read from the Isaiah scroll. Diana Butler Bass asserts that Jesus did not speak as a rabbi,

but as a *darshanim*-- a “speaker” or “teller” as was the custom in the Jerusalem temple at the time. The *darshanim* would read a text from the scrolls of the Hebrew bible, taking “verses literally out of their textual context and the speaker would apply them to the religious, political, and ethical questions all around. Preaching involved making an ancient story, the wisdom of the prophets, alive for the day.”¹ Today, I as your *darshanim*, must make sense of a passage in which Jesus seeks to make sense of a passage that originally came from Isaiah. In this hall of mirrors may we somehow see ourselves and may we somehow see God and discover what we are to do with one another.

Jesus’ defining words for his ministry were about the Spirit of the Lord anointing him to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and letting the oppressed go free. They were a reflection of Isaiah’s prophecy, and just as Jesus shaped his ministry around these words, my call to ministry was also inspired by these words; my sense of call was awakened when I was doing ministry with the homeless in Atlanta when I was in college. The witness of the I attended, which not only housed the homeless but also worked to change policies in Atlanta that criminalized behaviors such as sleeping on park benches-- gave me great hope in what faith communities could do to create positive social change. It was good news to the poor, and I wanted to be part of spreading it.

We are each called to look into this scripture and see where our reflection lies. And so, I have invited Elder Keyla Garcia to give a witness to how she sees herself reflected in this scripture. She will speak now to how serving on a Mission Trip has been a way that this scripture’s call, “to bring good news to the poor,” speaks to her. So now I will drop the mic, not because I have preached so powerfully, but because there is another powerful voice in the room and I want to make room for her.

Below is an outline of Elder Keyla Garcia’s testimony:

- Came to the USA: 30 years ago; not by choice
- a. Smart decision of my parents
 - i. Choosing to leave behind an established life and loved ones
 - ii. Search of a better life, a better future
- II. Sponsored by my aunt
- a. Mother’s sister

¹ Diana Butler Bass “The Power of Today” Sermon for Jan. 24, 2016 on Day1.org

- b. 20+ yr living in the US
- c. Big doors entrance: Legal permanent residents
- d. The hardships of being a foreigner in a strange land didn't vanished
 - i. There was the language barrier
 - ii. the lack of education (not professionals)
 - iii. the lack of good paying jobs; factory jobs with minimum wage
- III. The promising and wonderful country didn't seem that wonderful any more
 - a. Many days of hard long working hours
 - b. Two jobs as a way to get on their feet faster
 - c. Started to feel satisfied
 - i. plenty to eat
 - ii. Children were getting an education
 - iii. Not perishing
- IV. For many immigrants, the USA is the land of
 - a. Opportunity, prosperity, achievement and hope
 - b. But it's also the land of hard work and sacrifice, fear and loneliness
 - c. It is the land of giving and taken away
 - d. The land of joy and goodness
 - e. But also the land of tears and suffering
- V. Family was lucky enough to come into this country with the green light
 - a. so we were welcomed and I am thankful for that
 - b. I obtained an education and so did my 3 siblings
 - c. Thanks to my degree, I found jobs of descent pay
 - d. And thanks to those jobs and to my good credit, I was able to buy a house
 - e. Thus, living the American dream
 - f. For me then, the USA has been the land of prosperity and achievement
- VI. What I hope for this country is to reshape into what it has strived to be for so long
 - a. Country of value and respect
 - b. A country that is capable of learning from past mistakes to not make them again
 - c. A country that is eager to learn from each other's differences
 - i. In order to coexist with acceptance and unification