

## **2025 01 26 – Jesus' Inaugural Address**

**Scripture:** Luke 4:14-21 (*The Inclusive Bible*)

On Monday we watched as a new United States president was sworn in and we listened as he gave his inaugural address. This tradition of inaugural speeches goes back to George Washington, the first president of the United States.

Inaugural speeches are an opportunity for a new president to present their vision of their country and to set forth their goals or mission for the nation. Some of the most eloquent and powerful inaugural speeches are still quoted today. One of the most famous quotes is from John F Kennedy. He said, "ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."

It seems appropriate that on this Sunday our scripture reading from the Gospel of Luke includes at least some of Jesus' inaugural speech. The word inaugural means opening or foundational. Just as each president laid out their vision and goals, Jesus also lays out his vision for his ministry.

Like a newly inaugurated president, Jesus' work was just beginning. After spending forty days in the wilderness, Jesus returned to his home province of Galilee. The author of this Gospel tells us that Jesus returned "in the power of the Spirit." In other words, he was inspired by God. Jesus started to teach in the synagogues and the people that heard him were in awe of the words and the wisdom that he shared. Soon his reputation spread throughout the region of Galilee. Jesus was becoming famous.

And then Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. This was the place where his parents, Mary and Joseph, lived. It was the place where he and his brothers and sisters had grown to adulthood. It was in Nazareth that Jesus gave his inaugural address.

It was Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath day, and Jesus entered the synagogue where all his relatives and neighbours were gathered. He entered the synagogue just as he had done every Sabbath throughout his life. When it was time, Jesus stood up to read from the ancient Hebrew scrolls. He was handed the book of Isaiah and he unrolled it until he found the following words, "The Spirit of our God is upon me: because the Most High has anointed me."

At this point it's not clear that Jesus is talking about himself. At this point, he's just reading the familiar words of the book of Isaiah from a scroll. But as you know, after reading from the scroll, Jesus gave it back to the attendant and sat down. In those days, rabbis sat down to teach. Everybody was waiting for his words, "all eyes were fixed on him" and Jesus said to them, "Today, in your hearing this scripture passage is fulfilled." Now we can imagine that Jesus said a lot more than that. How many teachers or preachers, for that matter, do you know who can say all they need to say in one sentence? But this is obviously the most important sentence that Jesus shared that day. It is the crux of his teaching.

Jesus is saying to his family, his neighbours that this scripture is about him. He is the one that God has called. Jesus is saying that God has given him a

mission, a ministry. Now the actual words that Jesus used, the words from the Book of Isaiah, were “the Most High has anointed me.” In those days it was kings and emperors who claimed to be anointed by God. The people of Galilee and Judea were looking for a King, an anointed or chosen one. They were looking for someone who would save them from their Roman oppressors. In Hebrew the word for “anointed one” is Messiah. In Greek the word is Christ. Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah, the Christ, the one they have been waiting for.

Obviously my metaphor breaks down here since presidents and other world leaders, despite what they may claim, are certainly not anointed by God. In democratic countries, they are, in fact, chosen by the people. They are chosen based on the people’s understanding of who they are, what they represent, and what they are promising to do. Democracy depends on the voice of the people.

But whether someone is anointed by God or chosen by the people, they all have a vision and goals. In his inaugural speech, Jesus used the words of the prophet Isaiah to lay out his vision for his ministry. He read,

The Spirit of God is upon me:

Because the Most High has anointed me  
to bring Good News to those who are poor.

God has sent me to proclaim liberty to those held captive,

Recovery of sight to those who are blind,

and release to those in prison—

to proclaim the year of our God’s favor.

It's interesting, I went back to the actual words in Isaiah 61:1-2 and they are slightly different. Instead of "recovery of sight to those who are blind," it says, "to heal broken hearts." I believe Jesus' mission can be stated in three words: justice, healing and freedom. Jesus was anointed by God to improve the status of the poor, to find justice for those on the margins, to facilitate the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional healing of all people. His mission was freedom for all; freedom from any chains or walls that were keeping people from living out their God-given purpose in the world, whether those chains were internal (like fear or shame or guilt) or external (like poverty, illness, oppression, imprisonment).

As followers of Jesus I believe that we have that same mission. I believe that we are called to work for justice, healing and freedom. Of course, our first call is to accept the power of the Spirit in our own lives, to do our own work, our own healing, to break free of the bonds that are keeping us from living our lives as God intended. And even as we are working on ourselves (and that is a lifelong task), we can also do the work of helping others. We can do the work of striving for justice, we can care for those in need, and we can speak up when we see barriers to freedom. We can do our part to make a difference in our families, in our church and in our communities. Every small thing that we do will make a difference in our world.

Not all of us have the privilege of speaking from the pulpit of the National Cathedral in Washington DC, but Bishop Marion Edgar Budde does. On Tuesday she had the courage to speak directly to the President of the United

States. In her sermon she said his name and asked him to have mercy on the marginalized people in their country that are scared. And let's be clear, they are scared because of the Executive Orders that this president signed on his first day in office. She mentioned transgender children, illegal immigrants and their American-born children and finally refugees fleeing for their lives. Bishop Budde has been lifted up by many in the United States and around the world as someone who has the courage to speak the truth even to those in power, even to those who do not want to hear it. I see her as an example for us all. I see her as someone who is living out Jesus' mission of justice, healing and freedom for all.

I'm not sure how many presidents have given inaugural speeches that reflect Jesus' mission, but Harry Truman in his address in 1949 expressed at least some part of it. I have taken the liberty of making this portion of his speech a little more inclusive, bringing it into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, by using the word "people" rather than "men." President Truman said:

The American people stand firm in the faith which has inspired this Nation from the beginning. We believe that all [people] have a right to equal justice under law and equal opportunity to share in the common good. We believe that all [people] have a right to freedom of thought and expression"

<https://www.today.com/life/holidays/inauguration-day-quotes-rcna186477>

Inaugural speeches are a great opportunity for presidents to express their vision and goals. Just as Jesus took the opportunity to share his mission at the beginning of his ministry, we also have our own mission statement, our own

understanding of what we have been called to do. I invite us now to stand as we are able and say together the words of the Mission Statement of First United Church:

We at First United Church,  
    guided by the Spirit,  
are striving to be  
    an Open and Diverse Community of Faith.  
Through words and action we pursue the values of  
    Spiritual Growth,  
    Compassionate Outreach,  
    Social Justice and  
    Care of the Earth.

May it be so. Amen.