

When I was a younger, I used to be quite involved in politics, I supported congressional campaigns, led door knocking campaigns, call centres and perhaps this will come as a surprise I ran for political office in Northwest Pennsylvania. During my campaign I had for the most part one speech, what is commonly referred stump speech which I delivered time again.

A stump speech is the main message you hope deliver, over and over again, so people will know who you are and what you stand for.

In our Gospel reading Jesus delivers what is commonly referred to as the sermon on the plain.

These beatitudes of Luke, Jesus sermon in Luke 6:20-26 contains what are 4 blessings (what we often call beatitudes, and the four woes. This is in contrast with Matthew's Gospel where Jesus sermon is comprised nine spiritualized beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12).

Like the sermon on the mount, Jesus sermon on the plain is also preceded by a moment on the mountain. In the verses immediately preceding our reading today, Jesus is situated on a mountain, in scripture the mountain is an elevated place of prayer, of revelation, and encounter with God, anyone familiar with scripture will recall the several covenantal occasions in both the Old and New Testaments. Think of Moses ascending Sinai, we understand from Luke, that this is the place where Jesus will select his disciples.

Luke describes Jesus as selecting his disciples on the mountain, but there is another key difference from the Sermon the on the Mount in Matthew 5.

Jesus descends the mountain, he is elevated but then descends to what Luke describes as a "level place", where he will encounter the crowds of people who have come to see and touch him. They seek healing, to be freed of unclean spirits.

And it is here on this plain, that Jesus will deliver his speech. A few commentators suggest that because of the rhythmic quality of the words that Jesus proclaims in his sermon, that this may have been a teaching mantra that was repeated time and again, by Jesus himself and probably his disciples.

Which brings me back to my earlier example that the words may have been something like Jesus' stump speech outlining his vision, and platform for the Kingdom of God.

Jesus vision is prophetic, it challenges the existing order of things, His presence, among the people not those with perfect lives, but those who are broken, poor and oppressed. By descending from the mountain he is showing favour to lower people!

Luke 4.18-19. Jesus speaks using the words from the Prophet Isaiah 61:1-2

*“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.”*

And these words of Jesus reflect Luke’s accounts of words of Mary the mother Jesus in the Magnificat.

“And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

This should not come as a surprise, as he as Messiah has come to challenge and up-end the existing order and understanding of things. The low will be elevated, the hungry will be fed, the sick will be healed. But to those have favour, the rich and the powerful the news is not so good.

Jesus moves from the mountain top to stands among the people and his disciples on the plain, Revelation has moved from the mountain top to the people to meet them where they are at, on the plain.

To close

The fact that words Jesus repeated in ministry and reflect the recurring themes of Luke shows us that that these words are very, very important, they are really important.

Jesus' stump speech is turning the world upside down. The values of God's kingdom and kingdom of this world are different.

That Jesus does not stay on the mountain descends to the people who are need the disciples follow him and learn from in this level place. That he proclaims words of hope for the poor, the oppressed, the sick are meant to stick in our minds, they are meant to confront us. What does this mean to us? Does our ministry find it way to the level place. To the struggles of those around us, in our families, in our community, does it extend beyond the walls of the church.

God born as an infant one without a home, is the same Jesus who descends from the mountain top to the level place with his disciples to follow, to learn and to live this new kind of life, rooted in a very different kind of value system which privileges the lowest echelons of society over the high and mighty.

In our Gospel reading we see that spirit of Jesus ministry in our Gospel reading is becoming incorporated into the church through Jesus' shared ministry with his disciples.

Jesus by his ministering to people, through acts of healing is also teaching, he is showing them, and us, what a life of discipleship looks like.

The good news is coming to the people. Jesus does not withhold healing and blessing for the select few, but blessing, hope and vision of spiritual and physical liberation those who turn to him in need. To those are high, they will in his words will be "brought low", to the level place. Their status in the Kingdom does not make them better than those at the lowest parts of society.

It's called "The Sermon on the Plain" shows that discipleship does not remain on the mountain, but finds a level place to connect with people. This is more than just an act is an upending of power relations in the world. Jesus is willing to meet people the poor, the hurting, the those sick in body, mind and spirit destitute and, each one of us, at a level place. And in doing he showing us what is to be disciples, what it means to follow him in his ministry.