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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw  
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Lectionary Year C: Luke 4:14-21

Jesus' ministry could be viewed as a ministry against ignorance and the imprisonment that ignorance can cause. Certainly, the many ways in which Jesus upset religious authorities shows that they did not appreciate having their ignorance pointed out to them...nor did they appreciate the attacks on their hypocrisy. In short, Jesus waged a campaign against a self-serving religion that cared more about ritual correctness than people, especially people who were poor, outcast, and disenfranchised.

Getting back to the matter of ignorance, we can see how human sinfulness can obscure any real view or understanding of the problems and injustices around us. Speaking personally, I have tried not to be ignorant of, for example, the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed around me. For me, ministry here at St. Anne's has made it far less likely to be misinformed or underinformed as to their situation. And from there, my mind wants to explore systematic ways to improve their lot in life, without assuming that they all have big screen TVs and fancy smartphones.

Now, I could spend the rest of this sermon reiterating the main points of this morning's Gospel text -- Luke, chapter 4, verses 14 through 21. I could tell you about the ways in which Jesus' ministry flows from the words of Isaiah that he read in the Nazareth synagogue. And I could tell you about all the great pillars of

the Christian faith who followed accordingly. But that wouldn't necessarily apply to us. As with any Scriptural text, we need to examine how we, in the grander scheme of things, fall into this text. To borrow from a well-worn question: "Who are we, and why are we here?"

If Jesus is the appointed bringer of good news to the poor, captive, blind, and oppressed, then at least one of our responses to his proclamation could include self-identification with any or all of these categories. Now we may not literally be poor, captive, blind, or oppressed, but we can certainly emulate poverty, captivity, blindness, and oppression.

We can be impoverished of information and insight.

We can be captive to sin and falsehood.

We can be blind to the truth, even when it is before our very eyes.

We can be oppressed by stubbornness and a refusal to see things in a different light.

This can be due to any number of things -- fear, anxiety, or the Old Adam from the Book of Genesis hanging around our necks. But the consequences are most profound in, of all places, our mind. Yes, our mind. Remember where we began, on the matter of ignorance. Well, sometimes the mind opts to keep certain things out, like information, enlightenment, a different way of looking at things, and so on.

Now, think of the Episcopal Church as a whole. Historically, we have placed much importance on education, as evidenced in our many prep schools, colleges, and seminaries across the United States. Some statistic somewhere noted that the Episcopal Church has the most members with PhDs of any denomination in America. So we can rightfully say that we understand an educated Christian to be faithful to his or her baptismal vocation through learning. Hopefully, when Episcopalians speak, they speak in a truthful and well-informed manner instead of bearing false witness.

Episcopalians speak from education and experience instead of ignorance...most of the time.

Unfortunately, we live in a time in which educated persons are not always respected or even listened to. For many, the truth is not found in research or data; instead, it is found in popular opinion and emotional appeal. Granted, I'm a slow learner in this regard, but I have gotten into arguments in which I present factual evidence only to find myself on the receiving end of anger and accusations. And, given the current climate of incivility in our culture, you've been in the same boat, too, at one time or another.

But should we be surprised? No. Just remember what happened to Galileo when he posited that the earth revolved around the sun and not the other way around. Ignorance may not only be bliss, it also may be power. Or, if you have enough power to defend your ignorance, you'll never have to worry about the truth, because you can quickly extinguish anyone who proclaims it!

Somebody was put to death a couple thousand years ago for proclaiming the truth, if you remember...

But, for us, this isn't all bad. Today, Jesus proclaims an end to impoverishment of information and insight. He proclaims an end to captivity to sin and falsehood. He proclaims an end to blindness to the truth. He proclaims an end to the oppression generated by stubbornness and a refusal to see things in a different light.

In short, Jesus' campaign against ignorance has come to us, and Jesus is releasing us from captivity to it!

Two thousand years ago, Jesus came to open people's minds to a different way...a way distinguished not by correct ritual observance and blind obedience to the rules, but by love of God and neighbor. But there were a lot of people who weren't receptive to this...who preferred instead to remain ignorant to what God was revealing to them.

Today, whether it is the way of Christ or the way our congregation conducts its Annual Meeting, it is imperative that we remain receptive to the eye-opening truth that dispels ignorance. Furthermore, we are called to be diligent learners, always educating ourselves not merely for education's sake, but for the betterment of all our brothers and sisters across the globe. Ultimately, an ignorant person is a selfish person, concerned only about his or her narrow spectrum of self-interested pursuits. So consider yourselves antidotes to self-interest; as informed and Christ-like

disciples, you're aware of the world around you and equipped to respond with justice, compassion, and love.

Now you are the people bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, recovering sight to the blind, and letting the oppressed go free!

This is what you can do when Jesus lifts the veil of ignorance from you.

And certainly, you'll occasionally find yourself being the Galileo in the room, or rubbing against the grain of popular opinion. But think of the ways in which being faithful means being courageous. To merely see popularity is to be unfaithful and cowardly...not to mention short-sighted. With the eyes of faith, however, you will see your Lord who is in it with you for the long haul.

Short-term popularity won't mean quite as much then...

Lastly, think of Jesus' campaign against ignorance as a means of participating in his redeeming work in the world. He has opened your eyes, and now you open the eyes of others. Open their eyes by proclaiming God's love and motivating them by that love to love one another. As we envision a world that is more just and compassionate -- and less cruel and violent -- may we always keep our Lord before us...our Lord who releases us from ignorance and welcomes us into redemption.

Amen.