

Homily – Now Is Sacred

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Today before we conclude this worship service we will have our annual business meeting. This meeting is an opportunity for us to examine the past year and an occasion for us to day dream about where we are going as a church in 2025. It is important for us to know where we have been so that we can chart a course that I pray is led by the Holy Spirit. Come Holy Spirit, Come.

In today's Gospel lesson we heard Jesus reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, and at the end of the reading he said "He sent me... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And, after he sat down Jesus told those gather that day "today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." In other words, he told them that that very present moment was the year of the Lord's favor.

How would you react today, if you were told this is the year of the Lord's favor. This year, 2025, is going to be one of the best. Get ready for some really good stuff. How would you react? My reaction would be one of skepticism. I'll believe it when I see it. The last few years have had such a roller coaster ride, that I don't think I would be alone in my skepticism. Wars and threats of wars. Violence of all stripes. The catastrophic effects of climate change. The long shadow of racial injustice. Alarming breakdowns in civility and basic kindness. Rising epidemics of anxiety, depression, addiction, and despair. And let's not forget the very real fears of our immigrant brothers and sisters. Will there be a knock in the night? Will the way a person looks cause them to be rounded up and sent away? Will families be separated, again? Who on earth would reasonably call our current moment holy, or favored of God?

But, that is what Jesus tells his listeners. And, by extension he is telling us the same thing. Jesus invites us to attend to now. He has been making this invitation for two thousand years. Now, and all the now's that have every existed, are sacred. There is sacredness in the present moment. Do you see it? Do you feel it? The year 2025 is a sacred time. Today shimmers with the presence, the favor, and the blessings of God. Whether you know it or not, whether you see it or not, God is present and showering us with blessings. Now is the year of God's favor, so what are you going to do about it?

Now all of this helps me realize how reluctant I am at times to embrace the holiness of "today." Perhaps like some of you, I feel like I am holding my breath to see what happens in our world. Deferring and deflecting, as if the days we live in right now don't count as "real life." I tell myself that real life will resume someday. Or, real life will start when we get some sort of handle on climate change, teen depression, and

sectarian violence. We have a lot of these qualifications about when real life will begin again. But remember, we have always had lots of qualifications. Real life will begin when I get my dream job, or when my home remodel is done, or when the kids are settled and married. Real life will happen when my political party is in power. We have always been a people who put life on hold and dream of the past or ruminate about the future. However, throughout the centuries the mystics and sages have known a truth that is taught to us again today by Jesus. Real life is now. We already have enough to live into the blessings that we have from God. We have enough and don't need to wait.

And, if we live in the present with what we have, then we can expect three things to happen. First, we can expect the calming of many of our fears and anxieties. And second, we can expect to be more aware of the presence of God in our lives. And third, when life is disrupted, really disrupted, for ourselves or even for our Country, then we are in the spiritual place to react appropriately in a non-violent way. Don't these three things sound like things you want in your life and in the lives of your loved ones?

We are a society and people that is plagued by anxiety and fear. Like the disciples two thousand years ago, we live our lives shaped and controlled by our fears and anxieties about money and health and status and power. Imagine what it would be like to give up these fears and anxieties and to live in a state of joy. We get too concerned about who is the greatest and not concerned enough about spending time with the children that surround us. Do we really need to face death before we will pay attention to each moment? Why do we let anxiety fuel our engines, driving us to think always of the "should's" and the "what ifs?" Why does it always seem as though we are running on a treadmill?

Are we that afraid to stand still? When we become lost in the memories of the past or pre-occupations about the future, we forget the power of paying attention and how, without attention, we live on the surface, and our lives lack joy. In any discussion about why we avoid living in the present or seeing what is really before us, it is important to face the fact that sometimes, what is before us seems unbearable. Sometimes we are in so much pain that even when we do look around us, we can't see anything but the pain. However, sometimes great things, even unexpected miracles, can be standing right in front of us but we can't see them.

And that is the second benefit of living in the present. When we live in the here and now, we start to notice the eternal presence of God. Through the enormity of time and space, God is always with us. God is with us in the good times and the bad times. God is with us in the big things and God is with us in the small things.

Living in the present means seeing without the lens of panic or fear so that we can pay attention to the miracles that are right in front us. It is about accepting what is. It is knowing that Jesus has assured us of a future. It is about remembering but not continuously reliving the high school days. Living in the now is about letting go of all the fretting when we are trying to decide to sell the house or not. It is about learning how to die so that we can learn how to live. When we are present, we are more alive, and we see we are held in the eternal embrace of God. I am firmly convinced that we are blessed by God in ways that we know and in ways that we don't know. God blesses, and blesses, and blesses. We don't need to wait for new blessings, and what we already have from God is more than sufficient. And, with this mindset we have a strong base so that we can step up to be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus in a world that sorely needs us.

In our Thursday night book study on Walter Wink's book "The Powers That Be" we talked about the spiritual foundation we need so that we are in a place to confront things in our world that are not of Jesus. As followers of Jesus we are not to be passive in the face of the powers and principalities of this world. Corporations and governments and laws are needed to help us living in community. But when those institutions stop serving the public good and instead serve their own good, then as followers of Jesus we are called to confront those powers and principalities in a way that is non-violent. And, sometimes that challenge of the powers is with our voices. Speaking truth to power is an act of bravery especially when it can put you into harm's way.

Bishop Budde is the Episcopal Bishop of Washington in our nation's capital and on Tuesday she shared a sermon at the National Cathedral. The setting was the National Prayer Service attended by President Trump, his family, and many who were celebrating his recent ascent to power. Here are her words at the end of her sermon

"Mr. President, millions have put their trust in you. As you told the nation yesterday, you have felt the providential hand of a loving God. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now. There are transgender children in Democratic, Republican and independent families who fear for their lives.

And the people who pick our crops and clean our office buildings; who labor in our poultry farms and meat-packing plants; who wash the dishes after we eat in restaurants and work the night shift in hospitals – they may not be citizens or have the proper documentation, but the vast majority of immigrants are not criminals. They pay taxes, and are good neighbors. They are faithful members of our churches, mosques and synagogues, gurdwara, and temples.

Have mercy, Mr. President, on those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away. Help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here. Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were once strangers in this land.

In my own spiritual journey I am glad that Bishop Budde was able to speak these words of mercy to power. Sometimes when we only focus on our blessings we forget that those blessings are to equip us so that we can move into action. This is the third benefit of living in the now, we are a non-anxious presence in the world, we see God and God's blessings all round us, and we move from this foundation to make a difference in the world.

Now, I know some of you here today are happy with President Trump and his new policies and some of you are not happy. Be that as it may I hope St. Barnabas is a place and a community that equips you on your spiritual journey so that you can help to bring God's kingdom into this world.

This is a year of the Lord's favor, and here at St. Barnabas my prayer in 2025 is that we are the light of Christ in the world. We have a good way of being the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement. We have a spirituality that is focused on love, love of God, love of others, love of self, and love of the rest of nonhuman creation. We have a vestry or governing board in which more than half the people were not here at St. Barnabas six years ago. We embrace social justice and the actions we need to take to be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus here in the South County. We work to let go of envy, resentment, and fear, and the things that separate us. And, we celebrate and work to protect our LGBTQ siblings and our immigrant brothers and sisters.

I end today with the prayer Bishop Budde used at the end of her sermon on Tuesday. "May God grant us all the strength and courage to honor the dignity of every human being, speak the truth in love, and walk humbly with one another and our God, for the good of all the people of this nation and the world."