

## Gettin' to the Promised Land: Jubilee

(Text: *Leviticus 25:8-24*)

I'm happy to be here. It's beautiful to be a part of a community like this one. I'm happy to see how the Body of Christ is working together to improve the city. When churches do this it is a recognition that nothing is truly ours. Churches begin to do this when they stop competing for resources, competing for people, competing for pride. The pride of: "We are the best church, we have the most people, we have the best preacher, the best building," the best whatever it is. To stop this shows that there is a realization that we are working for God's kingdom. It recognizes that the city we are a part of, the land that we stand on, the places we visit here do not truly belong to any of us but rather to God.

We have learned to see space, geography, land as a passive object, as if it doesn't have a rich history and as if our locations, the places we find ourselves, the places we live our lives happened by chance. The danger of this is we forget how the geography has shaped our stories, and how we have helped to divide up the spaces around us in order to fit our social understanding of belonging. Which, sadly, when we look at our cities, our country, we see, as Dr. Willie Jennings would say, that we have a poor imagination of what it means to belong, of what it means to belong to place and to one another.

Here in Leviticus we see how active the land is in the story, how the people not only have a relationship with one another, a relationship with God, but a relationship with the land. We see in the text how relationships are restored, how it says everyone will return to their kin, everyone will be released from debt, from slavery. The year of Jubilee represents this great time of freedom and reconciliation, and what we learn from Leviticus is an important aspect of reconciliation – that humanity is being reconciled with the land and recognizing land as an

important partner.

### **The Earth: Our Partner and Nurturer**

We are placed on equal footing with the land. We are supposed to work it, to care for it. That does not mean we are above it. We do not truly own it, it is God's. (V. 23)

Throughout human history we have struggled with this fact. Genesis teaches us we were to have dominion over the earth, but what this means is to protect it, to partner with it, to work the land. However, we have allowed land to be wrapped up in our twisted economy. We have twisted our relationship with God, with one another and with land. Instead of understanding it as a part of God's creation, something to be enjoyed, to experience, and as something that is intimately connected to our well-being and existence, we have believed the lie that we are independent creatures, that we are not dependent upon land for our survival. We have seen it as something we can twist and manipulate for our own selfish gains.

But the text today teaches us that while we are in an intimate relationship with the cities and lands that we are located in, we are not the owners of that land. The year of jubilee was meant to be a reminder of who truly owns the land.

That is why today the Church must be careful how we engage in conversations about land, and who owns the spaces we find ourselves in. God says the land is mine and you are sojourners, you are aliens, you are foreigners, you are immigrants. God is not only asking us to be reconciled back to the land, to begin to recognize how we have treated God's land, to recognize how we have ended up in the spaces that we inhabit and why we have divided ourselves up, sectioning off parts of the land, and imagining the spaces we encounter with the same sad imagination that determines our relationships with one another. God is also asking us to reconcile ourselves back to one another. So we are not just put back on equal footing with the land, but with one another.

*v.13-17: "In this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his property. **14** And if you sell to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. **15** According to the number of years after the jubilee, you shall buy from your neighbor, and according to the number of years for crops he shall sell to you. **16** If the years are many you shall increase the price, and if the years are few you shall diminish the price, for it is the number of the crops that he is selling to you. **17** You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God."*

Standing before God reveals to us how we are to interact with one another. God calls us all foreigners. None of us have any more say over the land than any of the other people we find around us. So as we are being reconciled with the land, as we are seeking justice for the spaces we encounter and make up, we must also be seeking justice and peace for the people we encounter. The year of jubilee was meant to be a chance for an unjust, broken economy to be set right, to be reconciled back to a healthy order, set by God.

### **Swept Up in the Movement of Justice**

The reminder of whose land it is comes with it a reminder of whose we are. The text tells us to not wrong one another, and the reason is simply because God is God. "Because I am the Lord your God." The "your" is plural. As the people are changing their economic practices and attempting to right some of the wrongs in the economy, as the rich are giving up a little, as people are losing a little of what they had while others are regaining what they had lost, there is this reminder that whether you feel like the movement of justice is one where you are giving up or receiving, we are all under the same command and direction of God. God is simply asking us to be swept up in the movement of justice, no matter where you currently stand in the economy.

The movement of justice reconciles us back with land and one another and places us all under equal footing, which does away with unjust economic practices that divide and split us, and places us back into the position to recognize God as our provider

We live in a state of scarcity. We fear we won't have enough, instead of trusting that God will provide. We live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, yet many people are living in poverty. We live in a world that has an obesity epidemic and people starving.

We fear we will not have enough. Or we have become so comfortable in the economy we have found ourselves in. We have become so comfortable in the neighborhoods we have found ourselves in, comfortable in the systems we consciously and unconsciously live in. The text today in verse 21 asks us to stop living in this mindset of scarcity, or this mindset of being comfortable – and to begin to live with some risk.

*v.21: "I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, so that it will bring forth fruit for three years. 22 When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating old produce; until the ninth year, when its produce comes in, you shall eat the old."*

### **We Aren't Called to be Comfortable**

We are to live our lives in a way that is dependent upon God's standing blessings, God's standing miracles. Change is difficult. Many of the people probably thought, "You know, the way we have things going is working pretty well for me. Do we really need to go through with this?" It sounds unpredictable, it sounds scary to do the things God is asking us. We feel confident and comfortable about what will happen if we just keep things the same, **but we are not called to be comfortable, we are called to be faithful.**

There is something happening in our country, where more and more people are beginning to ask tougher questions about the systems that have been running this country. About the

systems that have left our cities and land so divided by things such as race and money. More and more people are beginning to ask questions about why certain areas have resources while others do not, why some communities seem to be in a constant cycle of prison and poverty. More and more people are beginning to open their eyes when they drive to work or school and take notice of how none of this seems to be by chance, but rather by design. There is a recognition happening that being nice and having the right ideas is not enough, but that in order to change the system you must change your actions within it. And this always requires discomfort.

While I was in the Bay area there was a protest being held on the Bay bridge, where protesters gathered together and blocked traffic for a few hours in the day. Many people complained about it messing up their daily commute, how it threw off their day. But this is exactly the point. We have to change the way we do things if we want to change the systems we live in. You must change your daily routines if you want to change the generational routines of an unjust system.

Another small way I have seen this take place this last year is seeing how more and more people are pulling their money from companies and banks that have supported unjust systems like private prisons and many other things that are supporting the moral corruption of our systems. I myself have made moves to remove my money from a bank that refused to recognize the call in the verses today, "to do no wrong to people." This has been annoying and time consuming, but at the end of the day how small of a thing it is.

So many of us want change but aren't even willing to change our lives in the smallest of ways. Take a step and look at your land. Look at our land. This is often a first step for many of us. Many of us have not had to pay attention to injustice because we have had the option to ignore it. So even listening and paying attention to people unlike us, paying attention to communities you are not a part of can be that first step.

## **Blow the Horn**

The year of jubilee was a call to the people of Israel to look at their land, to look at how the systems they had set in place had impacted their country. The text opens with a call for people throughout the land to blow the horn.

Historians are unsure if Jubilee was actually practiced, but some say that the year Jesus died and rose was a year of jubilee. As the Holy Spirit came and released so many from bondage, we are called – as the text tells us today – to sound the horn. Sound it throughout our land.

It was blown for many reasons. One was warfare.

We are to sound the horn to begin the war on the economic injustices that have been created through our use of land. Church will engage in battle with oppressive forces that are dividing our country, forces that are contrary to the uniting spirit of God. We must sound the horn and become accustomed to the sound, accustomed to the discomfort, accustomed to the practices of the kingdom.

Because Jesus Christ is coming, and scripture tells us that when Jesus comes he comes sounding the horn. Church, if we are not accustomed to the war cry of our Messiah, if we are not accustomed to the geographic imagination of the kingdom of God, how will we recognize the sound? Will the tune that Christ is playing be familiar? Or will we, like so many of the Jewish leaders during Christ's time, miss God right in front of us?

Do we have ears to hear?

Do we have ears to hear the trumpet blasts of Christ?

Do we have ears to hear the trumpet blasts that bring every nation and tongue bowing before God?

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Or have our ears been compromised by the anthem of segregation?

Let us look upon our land with new eyes, let us hear with new ears.