

I. Advanced Organizer

- A. A week and a half ago, like many of you I spent my Wednesday morning watching a ceremony of pomp and circumstance: **our civic ritual of inauguration**. Joseph R. Biden and Kamala D. Harris took their oaths of office and officially became the 46th president and the 49th vice-president of the United States. The day was a mix of both tradition and strangeness, as familiar rituals were enacted but in unfamiliar ways, marked by face masks, social distancing, heightened security, and an absent outgoing president.
- B. And then into the center of this complicated ceremony stepped a young woman **whose presence and purpose was arrestingly clear: 22 year old Amanda Gorman**, the youngest inaugural poet, took the podium. In her recitation of her original work *The Hill We Climb*, Ms. Gorman gave voice to the moment we were living through with stunning clarity, grace, and hope. Her words captivated the country, drawing praise across the political spectrum. Her forthcoming books shot up the best-seller lists. Her social media accounts exploded. Why was that? What was it about Amanda Gorman's performance that brought her instant celebrity status?
1. I don't think it's that America overnight rediscovered a love of poetry. It wasn't just the brilliance of the words that moved the nation, **it was the voice speaking those words**. Ms. Gorman was speaking of a collective experience but bringing her whole self as she did, taking her unique place in the climbing of our hill. **It was a moment of emergence**, of a young woman who understood herself and understood something of what she was called to bring into the world taking her place and embodying that reality. In her own words this was a moment "where a skinny Black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president only to find herself reciting for one."
 2. We don't always recognize those moments of emergence when they're happening either to others or ourselves, but when we can see them for what they are, they can take our breath away. **When we can move with them, they can bring change into the world.**
- C. Well this morning we are continuing our current teaching series, a series we're calling "the Stories that Sustain Us". In this series, we're returning to the gospels to look at the life of Jesus, to read some of those stories afresh and consider what sustenance they might bring us in this challenging season we're enduring.
1. Two weeks ago we looked at a story from the gospel of John - the story of Jesus turning Water into Wine. As we saw, that story was John's opportunity to reveal something particular about Jesus and frame the rest of his telling of the gospel.
- D. But **we don't have just one account of the good news of Jesus, we have four**. And as we'll see throughout the series, each version brings us different nuances and colors to help us understand who Jesus really was and what he brings to sustain a weary world. **Today we're going to turn to the gospel of Luke**, and as we do, we'll look at a story that serves a similar purpose as the wedding at Cana did in John. This is the story Luke chooses to kick off Jesus ministry and tell us something unique about how he understands Jesus.
- E. Now you may remember from our overview, **Luke is one of the three "synoptics"** - the three accounts that share a lot of the same material, but at times with different emphases and details as each author highlights aspects that they feel are significant. This story we're looking at in Luke falls into that category. It seems to parallel a story told in Mark and Matthew, but in Luke's telling the story functions differently. Luke seems to have moved it towards the front of the narrative, perhaps to let it set-up the rest of what's coming in a unique way, and he gives us details that the others don't.
- F. So in the gospel of Luke, our story comes early into the narrative of Jesus' life. We've seen the prologue - stories of his miraculous birth, and a story about his boyhood. And then we see

Jesus as an adult come to be baptized by his cousin John in the Jordan, after which he endures 40 days of temptation in the wilderness. From there, Luke tells us this:

II. 14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. 15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

**18 “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,**

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

20 And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

A. We’ll pause there and read some more a bit later. Here we have a story about Jesus coming into his own. You could say he’s having his own Amanda Gorman moment. He is emerging as a leader. He has cultivated his sense of purpose. He has a vision of who he is and what he is to do in the world and he’s starting to speak it clearly.

B. So with that in mind, this morning I want to explore three questions about this moment of emergence for Jesus. The three questions we’ll be looking at are these:

1. What was Jesus declaring about himself in this Nazareth teaching?

2. How did he get there? What led him to make that declaration that day?

3. How did people respond?

C. For now we’ll focus on the first two and then we’ll read on to learn about the third. So first: **what was Jesus declaring?**

1. This is one of the main things that is unique about how Luke tells the story of Jesus preaching in Nazareth - he shares some of the actual content of the sermon itself, a detail that Matthew and Mark leave out. Luke fills the scene out, sharing with us the scripture being read and how Jesus uses that scripture to articulate his own self-understanding.

2. What does the content Luke shares with us tell us about how Jesus is identifying?

a) This text **comes to us from Isaiah** - predominantly Isaiah 61, with a line specifically about oppression that seems to be included from a few chapters before in Isaiah 58. Both **Isaiah 58 and Isaiah 61** are from the part of the prophetic book that **emerged in the exile**, a season in the biblical narrative we’ve explored a lot at Haven this year. During the long captivity in Babylon, prophetic voices added to the book of Isaiah with a vision of restoration, liberation, deliverance from the pain of exile. It’s a vision of God coming with justice to bring healing and redemption to those who’ve been oppressed. To bring blessing and Divine presence to those who’ve felt abandoned by God.

b) Isaiah speaks of **the year of the Lord’s favor**, reaching back into Israel’s history to a time in which God had declared release from debts - economic freedom. Every 50 years, the land was to be returned to the families it had once belonged to, so that

everyone had their own allotment. Everyone had what they needed to live freely. Debts were forgiven. Those who had become indentured servants were released. **It was a practice long neglected, but in these prophetic words, the prophet was announcing God's intention to bring that kind of release and restoration on a massive scale again.**

- c) When Israel had kings like David, they had been called God's anointed, people set apart for a special role to work with the Divine. In the words of Isaiah, the prophet imagines God sending their Spirit to anoint a new leader, a leader that will enact this Jubilee kind of deliverance. **The word for God's anointed in Hebrew was where we get the word *Messiah*. In Greek it was *Christus* or *Christ*.**
 - d) Jesus didn't choose this text simply to tell us what he cared about or hoped for. By reading this clear messianic text and then saying that was now being fulfilled with Jesus presence emerging as a young leader, he was making a bold, audacious claim: **I have been anointed by God and I am here to bring liberation, justice and healing. I am here to do the work of Jubilee.**
3. This isn't the only place Luke depicts Jesus pointing to these messianic texts to understand what he's up to. A few chapters later, Luke tells us a story about John the Baptist. At this point, Jesus has been making the rounds, preaching sermons with authority, and performing miracles. And John, who personally felt called to prepare the way for God's anointed one, but is now in prison for speaking against the political leader Herod, sent word through his followers to Jesus, asking if Jesus was indeed the one he'd been preparing people for. Jesus responds by once again pointing to the words of Isaiah:
- a) ***"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them."***
 - b) *Look at what I'm doing, Jesus says. Your answer is there. The jubilee hope that Isaiah dreamed of is coming to pass. Judge for yourself what that means.*
4. So in our story, we see Jesus, a humble tradesperson, likely a builder like his father Joseph had been, walk into his local synagogue, a place he has grown up. And after he has begun making a stir in the region as a spiritual teacher, for the first time, he steps into that role in his home town community. At that moment, he stands up and makes an audacious claim about himself and what he's there to do. **He knows who he is and he's ready to say it. He's ready to live it.**
5. I want you to think for a moment about your own story. **Where have you experienced moments of emergence?** Have you had places where you felt clarity about who you are and what you are to bring into the world? Have you had seasons where you have begun to embody that identity in a real way or enact that mission? Even though none of us are Jesus, none of us identify as the Messiah, **we all are called as individuals and collectives to bring our own selves forward as he did with purpose.** Christian tradition holds that **the same Holy Spirit that alighted on Jesus is available to each of us** - that we too are set apart in unique ways to bless the world we inhabit and participate in the redemption of creation. So what does that look like for each of us? What might it look like for us to come into our power, to take our unique place?
6. In Nazareth Jesus declares that he is anointed by God to minister first and foremost to the poor and oppressed and bring justice, healing and liberation to the world around him. That's what he declares about himself.

D. Which brings us to our second question. How did he get there? **What set of forces enabled Jesus to discover and step into the power within him in such a clear, confident way?**

1. Luke doesn't give us a lot to work with, but I think **we do get some clues**, clues that I think might be helpful in considering the forces that enabled Jesus to step into to his own power and calling, forces that may be instructive for us as we seek to do the same.
 - a) We see our first clue when **Jesus is a twelve year old boy**, lingering at the temple in Jerusalem as his family traveled there for a festival. In the caravan home his terrified parents realize he's not with the group and they return to Jerusalem to find their boy debating scripture with religious scholars. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" he asked them. Already we see him as a child discovering something unique about himself and trying it out, exploring it more. **This is a moment in Jesus' development, we might call it a moment of formation.**
 - b) Then about two decades later, Jesus appears again to be baptized like many other people in his day by John in the Jordan. But when Jesus is baptized, something powerful happens, something unique. He experiences the Spirit of God alighting him like a dove landing on his shoulder. He hears a voice speak words of truth and blessing. **"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."** **This is a powerful moment too, we might call it a moment of confirmation. Jesus's identity as the Divine Son is confirmed.**
 - c) And then after Jesus is blessed in this way, he's immediately **drawn into the desert where Luke tells us that for 40 days he was tempted by the devil.** Jesus goes from an ultimate high to a deep low - from the mountaintop to the crucible, but this testing, though a struggle, **seems to serve a purpose.** Again and again Jesus is given opportunities to use his power to save and benefit himself, and again and again he resists. As he does this, his conviction perhaps deepens, he comes to a truer understanding of **what his call is about and who it is meant to serve. We might call this a moment of maturation.**
 - d) Jesus doesn't simply emerge at age 30 ready to perform miracles and announce himself as God's anointed. Before that sermon in Nazareth, he has been shaped by moments along the way - **moments of formation, moments of confirmation, moments of maturation.**
2. Like Jesus, none of us emerge overnight either. **What moments of formation, confirmation, and maturation have prepared us to bring who we are fully forward into the world?** If you're not sure how to articulate your own identity, your own contribution in a bigger mission of redemption, perhaps it might be helpful to turn your attention to the ways you've been formed, ways things in you have been confirmed, ways life through trials and temptations has tested you and matured you. Perhaps examining this journey of formation, confirmation, maturation in your own life might give clarity to your own spaces of growth and emergence. Perhaps they'll inform what it is you are here to declare.

E. Well we've considered what Jesus' declaration was about, as well as how he got there. So now let's time to turn to **how people responded.** Let's look at what follows in Luke's account.

III. 22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" 23 He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" 24 And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. 25 But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six

months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; 26 yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” 28 When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30 But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

A. So how did folks respond to Jesus’ emergence? I think it’s fair to say, “**not great**”. By the end of the story, Jesus’ hometown community has become an angry mob trying to throw him off a cliff. Why is that?

1. **Things start off pleasant enough.** Clearly the people were impressed by Jesus’ preaching. Whatever you thought of what it meant, there was legit skills to be admired. They were “amazed at his gracious words”. But in their amazement **there’s a hint of skepticism that Jesus picks up on and understands perhaps more than the people do themselves.**
2. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” They start to say. *Don’t we know this kid? Didn’t he play with our kids growing up? Didn’t he help you build your house last year? Did you know he could preach like that?*
3. And Jesus seems to understand that what they may think is simply a compliment - “local boy does well” - **brings with it a resistance to really allow Jesus to emerge.** And Jesus calls them out on it, pointing to the truth that this is an age old challenge that goes far beyond this group of people the day in Nazareth. “No prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown” he tells them.
4. To back him up, **Jesus points to two stories of prophets from the Jewish sacred texts - stories from their shared history about seasons in which prophets lived among them and the people they were sent to testify to ignored their prophetic calls.** The people Elijah and Elisha were sent to didn’t want to hear them. They couldn’t acknowledge the anointing on Elijah or Elisha, and so they missed out. God was doing life-changing things in the world through these prophets and those miracles Jesus described were blessings to people outside of Israel, Gentiles who were open to the work of God these prophets were here to enact. In the same way, Jesus senses that **these neighbors from Nazareth think they know Jesus, they think they understand him.** They think that because they know his parents, because they saw him as a boy, because they’ve watched him grow up, they understand him. And so when it really comes down to it, they may think - Jesus can preach a nice sermon but they don’t actually buy it. They may have heard about some miracles he’s supposedly done in Capernaum but they’re not convinced. *Let’s see it, Jesus. Heal yourself, doctor. Prove to us who really know you that you’re who you say you are.*
5. **But Jesus knows that as long as they are looking at him through their own assumptions and expectations, they can’t fully see his emergence.** They don’t know all of the moments of formation, confirmation, maturation that have brought Jesus to this day. They just see another boy from Nazareth. And when Jesus points this out, he touches a nerve.
6. Immediately the crowd turns from saying superficial but flattering things into a murderous mob. Filled with rage, they take him to a cliff and try to throw him off, but miraculously, wondrously, he escapes unharmed.

7. The story in a way serves in Luke to **be a preview of the bigger story he is telling**. Jesus is sent with the power of God to do redemptive work, but those who he is sent to ultimately reject his prophetic call. They become a murderous mob that conspires to kill him, and yet the Divine, not the mob, has the last word. This time, Jesus is killed but with Divine power, rises again.
 8. As we end, considering this last question of how people responded to Jesus' declaration, there's something profound that I think is both an encouragement and a warning to us. There's an encouragement and a warning as we see the pattern play out in Jesus life - him emerging and those around him rejecting his emergence.
 - a) **First, the encouragement.** Though hopefully none of us have found ourselves ready to be thrown from a cliff, I think many of us may resonate with the pushback we feel from those closest to us, when we have begun to emerge. We often see it in adolescence. I remember in middle school when I started having opportunities to sing solos or win essay contests, opportunities to excel at something, the adults in my life praised me, but many of my peers were indifferent or even cruel, making fun of me for the thing I had just done well. Now as a parent having seen one child survive middle school, it's clear the pattern persists.
 - b) But it's not just in adolescence we experience that pushback from those who think they know us, but may not understand that what is forming or maturing within us. It's the reason that for those who are LGBTQ, family members can be some of the hardest to come out to. When we experience a spiritual awakening, our friend or lover may not support it. If we start to have our eyes opened to toxic forces in the systems that have shaped us, forces like white supremacy, patriarchy, or heteronormativity, our siblings may feel most confused about that, and even enraged that we no longer accept our shared family history as good and the way we want to live going forward.
 - c) **The encouragement for us in those moments of emergence is not to be deterred by the skepticism of those who think they know us, but don't understand what is emerging within us.** Like Jesus, we are encouraged to attend to the anointing of the Divine Spirit, and allow that which God is doing within us give us the resolve and divine empowerment to calmly walk through the resistance and continue on our way.
 9. But **there's also a warning here**. This story invites us not just to connect with Jesus, but to **put ourselves in the shoes of those in Nazareth who were ready to push him off a cliff**. We're invited to consider: **where in our own lives might we be resistant to the emergence of others in our closest community?** How might our own fears or assumptions block our capacity to bless and move with another's emergence? What child amongst us is asking us to see them in a new way, the way they're discovering they really are? Do we have a spouse or partner or close friend that we're shutting down in some way, because we've been too close to really see the new thing coming forward in them? Is there a change happening in someone close to us that perhaps threatens the understandings we've always taken for granted? **What assumptions or preconceptions do we need to lay down so that we can honor the places of formation, confirmation, maturation in others stories and bless them becoming their full actualized selves?**
- B. Friends, we have been through a period in the last months and years which all of our systems have been under stress, and many still are. There is so much that has been wounded in recent years on so many levels. There is so much, as we move forward from this pandemic and from the last presidential term that we will be rebuilding. There is so much that needs healing. There is so much we are still confronting. **We can only experience the Jubilee Jesus was**

enacting if all of us are released fully into who we are made to be. That means receiving our own anointing and emerging, as well as honoring the emergence of others. May we, Haven, be a community that does that well together, and may we bring our emerged selves to the world around us and encourage more emergence wherever we are. For as Amanda Gorman says:

1. *When day comes we step out of the shade,
aflame and unafraid,
the new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it.*
2. Amen.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

1. How would you articulate your own mission or identity? Who do you feel called to be or what do you feel called to bring into the world? What gifts, skills, or passions do you have to uniquely contribute to the world around you?
2. Can you identify moments of formation, confirmation, and maturation in your own journey?
3. Where have you experienced resistance from others around you as you've emerged? Where have you felt resistant to changes with someone you've been close to?