

THE OPPRESSED GOING FREE

Including a Salute to the Netherlands

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, March 19, 2006



LUKE 4: 14-21 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. 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, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "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 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. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." <>

Spring is in the air – it is a beautiful day. During the past few days, precious memories are tugging my heart away to a country and its people, far across the sea. "Ik heb u lief mijn Nederland," ("I love you, my Netherland") where the tulips will soon be blooming and the familiar sound of wooden shoes on the cobbled road outside our beloved Church will again be blending with the singing of praises to God. Just the past week I received a book from dear Dutch parishioners, listing and explaining the many proverbs that the Dutch use in their everyday language. Since then, I am absorbing a nostalgic, daily dose of Dutch proverbs. Believe me, you can have 100% knowledge of the Dutch language – but still not be able to speak it properly, unless you also happen to know their attractive way of proverbial speaking. How I miss hearing and sharing that rich colorful language!

English also have a wide variety of expressions. Shortly after arriving in America, I asked someone where the "Lake Wobegon" was that I heard so much about. Now, many years later I understand that it is only a fictional town. The Lake Wobegon effect is the human tendency to overestimate one's achievements and capabilities in relation to others. Lake Wobegon is a mythical town where "all the women are good looking, all the men are strong, and all the children are above average." Experiments and surveys have repeatedly shown that most people believe that they possess attributes that are better or more desirable than average.

Obviously, by definition it is impossible for everyone to be "above average." Average is what most people are. Nobody, though, wants to admit it. Well, that is what makes it so difficult to explain the sermon that Jesus preached in Nazareth, his hometown. How can I look across this sea of faces - we who have so much, who are so well fed, so well clothed, so surrounded by the good things of life? I also have so many privileges to count. How can I tell you that Jesus came to save the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed? That is not us! We are winners. We are stars. We are all above average. We can skip over this one text. Surely, it is for someone else. On the other hand ... is it really?

Maybe we ought to listen. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me," says Christ, "because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." What, if anything, is Christ saying to you and me?

Maybe we are poorer than we think. Someone is silently saying, "You can say that again." Someone recently told me he is so heavily in debt that he is known as the "Leaning tower of Visa."

The late Mother Teresa, the famous little nun who worked so hard in the slums of Calcutta actually stated that she thought that we were even poorer than the poorest people she worked with.

A reporter asked her about the materialism of the West. She said, "The more you have, the more you are occupied," But the less you have the more free you are. Poverty for us is freedom. It is a joyful freedom. There is no television here, no this, no that. See, this is the only fan in the whole house... and we save it for the guests. Nevertheless, we are happy. I find the rich poorer," she said. "Sometimes they are lonelier inside ... The hunger for love is much more difficult to fill than the hunger for bread...the real poor know what is joy. The same reporter then asked about her plans for the future. She replied, "I just take one day at a time. Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not come. We have only today to follow Jesus. Is there anyone here as rich as Mother Teresa is? We are poorer than we think.

I will never forget a discussion with a so-called "pink lady," a volunteer at the reception desk of one of our area hospitals. "My husband and I had it all," she told me, "all the good things that our society values. Good jobs, a nice home, regular cruises and trips to exotic places. It is only now that my husband is gone that I realize, how shallow and inadequate our faith really was. I can remember when I picked out a church for us only because it had beautiful chandeliers. Then it happened. Both of us lost our jobs. For over a year, we struggled. It was during that time that we both came to know the goodness of God."

Amazing! In the midst of their struggle, they discovered the goodness of God! Surely, God's hand was more apparent during the times of plenty. That is not how it works, is it? Wealth deceives us into thinking that our own strength is enough. If we think that our possessions can carry us through - we are poorer than we think.

We are also not as free as we think. Bob Bartlett, an arctic explorer, tells about a summer expedition where he and his party gathered a selection of native birds. They kept these birds caged but well cared for during the long voyage across the ocean. One day a particularly restless bird escaped from its cage and took off in flight over the ocean. "Well, that bird is lost," he thought. However, before the end of the day, much to his surprise, he saw that same bird flying back towards the ship at a rapid pace. Looking spent and breathless, the little bird dropped upon the deck of the ship and surrendered itself. It no longer saw the ship as a prison but as a refuge. The ship was the only way to get across the deep wide ocean.

Freedom is a statement that contradicts itself. There comes that time in life when we want to throw off the chains that have so long bound us. We want to be free and away from it all! Later, however, we notice a profound hunger for things that are lasting, things that are good, things that build us up rather than tear us down. It is then we exercise our greatest act of freedom--the freedom to go home. See, we may not be as free as we think!

Jesus asked his disciples, "Having eyes, do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?"

Even Jesus' disciples did not see that the kingdom was **not about power but about love, care and service.**

So many people simply do not **see**. Husbands and wives who do not **see** the needs of their spouses, parents do not **see** the loneliness of their children, successful people who do not **see** that their success was won at the cost of their values. Blind people ~ until that day when Christ comes into our lives and helps us see.

You see, Christ's message is for us after all – Mother Teresa has a point! Truly, we are the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed. **What do we need from a Savior? We are all in the upper half of the class. We are all above average.**

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me," says Christ, **"because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed"** **Friends, this is Cocoa Beach, and not Lake Wobegon.** Jesus came for all of us after all! Can you say, "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine?"

AMEN



MIJN NEDERLAND



Waar de blanke top der duinen schittert
in den zonnegloed
En de Noordzee vriend'lijk bruisend,
Neerlands smalle kust begroet.
Juich ik aan het vlakke strand,
juich ik aan het vlakke strand:
'k heb u lief mijn Nederland
'k heb u lief mijn Nederland

Waar het lachend groen der heuvels
't kleed der stille heid' omzooft
Waar langs rijk beladen velden
Rijn of Maas of Schelde stroomt
Klinkt mijn lied op ouden trant,
klinkt mijn lied op ouden trant
'k heb u lief mijn Nederland
'k heb u lief mijn Nederland

Blijf gezegend , land der vad'ren
Maken eendracht sterk en groot
Blijve 't volk der Koninginne
houw en trouw in nood en dood.
Doe zoo ieder 't woord gestand,
doe zoo ieder 't woord gestand:
'k heb u lief mijn Nederland
'k heb u lief mijn Nederland