

Luke 4:14-21

“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....’”

“Read Aloud Time”

One of the great joys I have discovered over my 12 years of serving as a guest teacher is called “Read Aloud.”

While “Read Aloud” time is just what it sounds like, a time when teachers read to their students.

In middle school, the Sixth Grade teachers would use this time as a transition from recess back into classroom as a way of quieting the students.

“Read Aloud” time has allowed me to read (and listen) to some wonderful young adult novels I might not ever have chosen to read myself.

Of course, people have been long been doing “read aloud” time with one another in homes and public venues.

Staci and I use to read stories to Sam when he was still in utero. According to one source: “Science has shown that reading to your baby in the womb promotes brain activity and can promote early literacy skills and language development.”

“Literacy skills continue to develop while reading to your baby after they are born. Even though a baby is not able to talk, they are learning about the world around them.” (TerraCentre.com)

This is why parents read bedtime stories to their little ones and little ones love to be read to as well.

We recently had a request for volunteers to stop by and read the newsletter and other material to one of our older members whose eyesight was failing.

And now, thanks to technology, people can download books and listen to them on streaming services like Audible or on public library apps, like Libby.

As a family, we have enjoyed listening to the entire “Lord of the Rings” series, The Hobbit, and Harry Potter.

For me, a good story becomes an even better one when you have the just the right person reading aloud to you.

We have loved listening to the Australian voice of Rob Inglis read the Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit. And recently, I listen to writer Ann Patchett's book, The Dutch House, read by Tom Hanks.

But perhaps our most favorite person to read to us is writer Bill Bryson. With his Iowan and British accent, he narrates many of his own stories like "A Walk in the Woods" and "The Life and Times of the Thunder Bolt Kid."

If you enjoy audiobooks, I would highly recommend a Bill Bryson narrated book for your listening enjoyment.

Reading specialist, Kelly Thompson, who teaches with me at McFarland High School, and is a frequent guest along with her daughter Maya, here in our worship services, shared with me the following about the benefits of reading aloud:

"Reading aloud can be beneficial for a number of reasons. Kids can listen to/access higher level text (and therefore, language) through read aloud than perhaps they can independently. It also lends itself to visualizing. Readers do this when reading text alone, but likely for developing readers perhaps having challenges decoding (or have fluency issues), they're working hard to decode and then may not be visualizing."

She goes on to add: "Beyond comprehension though, my thoughts below about the value are as follows: Verbal language develops first, so I think we generally continue to respond more powerfully to voice. It builds connection, again the power of voice/inflection/expression all that we communicate verbally beyond words that can't be communicated on a page.

And finally, she notes that being read aloud to helps us connect emotionally, as it "may evoke positive memories of childhood for people who were read to aloud by parent/caregiver, or even just evoke the nostalgia of childhood (even school-related/classroom or teacher memories)."

Did your parents read to you as a child? Did you have a favorite story you like to have read to you? Can you still hear their voice as they read that book?

Of course, read aloud time wasn't limited to bedtime, classrooms or audiobooks on walks or car trips.

There was a time, when people gathered in public squares to hear important proclamations or news reports read aloud to them.

The Declaration of Independence was read to people this way, so have sacred texts like the Torah, the Gospels and the letters attributed to the Apostle Paul.

Throughout both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, people have gathered to hear their sacred texts read aloud to them.

One of the suggested texts for this morning was from the book of Nehemiah in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). In it, we hear of this famous "read aloud" moment: **"all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel. Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding... He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law...."**

From early morning until midday, the priest Ezra read aloud to the people. Everybody check your watches, we have a few more hours to go!

Then again, in another, perhaps for us, better known "read aloud" moment, Jesus has a go at it.

Gathered in his hometown synagogue with people he had grown up around, Jesus, who has yet to "officially" begin his public ministry, participates in a long-standing ritual of taking his turn in reading aloud from the sacred scrolls. He is handed the one from the Prophet Isaiah.

Similar to when lay people take a turn as liturgist and read the selected passage for the morning, Jesus unrolls the scroll, and reads these words from the Prophet Isaiah:

"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."

When we finish reading from the Bible, we offer the following response: **"For the Word of God in Scripture, For the Word of God among us, For the Word of God within us... We give thanks to God."**

Jesus on the other hand, rolls the scroll back up, sits down, and with all eyes fixed on him, says: **"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."**

Through well-worn, and perhaps too familiar words that those gathered have heard read many times, Jesus uses them to bring to life the living Word among them as his inaugural act of public ministry, an act in which, according

to scholar Debbie Thomas, **“he proclaims his identity, his purpose, and his vocation.”**

And for The Rev. Dr. David Lose, Jesus’ identity, purpose and vocation is found in **“God’s power,”** which is, **“always seen as peculiar, odd, and uncomfortable by the world because it focuses on those the world has overlooked, forgotten, or discarded... that God sees all, loves all, and intends and promises to redeem all.”**

In Jesus, who we believe is the Word of God made flesh, that Word still lives and moves among us and within us.

As Debbie Thomas says: **“It is organic, it breathes, it moves in fresh and revolutionary ways. The Word of God is neither dull nor dead. It is alive...”**

Finished reading aloud and sharing his final words: **“Today, the Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”**

And having “heard” what Jesus read and said aloud to them, as any preacher knows, the most important moment arrives now, how will people respond to his message.

As is often the case, students never want read aloud to end, they want you to continue reading just one more page to find out what happens next. Alas, we have to close the book now, but will continue it next week.

In the meantime, what do you think happens? How will this all end?

Amen.