

Homily January 26, 2025 Jesus Reads Teresa Hanlon

Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 7cd, 8-10; Psalm 19; Revelation 5:1-5; Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

When has a reading for you—poems, play, prose—been brought to life?

A long time ago, before we had kids, Vincent and I were at a poetry reading with Roger McGough in London, England. He's a poet from Liverpool, part of the Mersey poets from the 1960's. Throughout his performance, I was engaged and deeply moved at times by the poems, not only because of their content, but because of they were related to my own life, and the *way* they were read. McGough brought the texts alive. For instance, his head moved side to side like watching a ping pong ball as he described a love relationship. More than forty years later, I may not remember those exact words, but I remember the connection I felt, the enthusiasm I had for his performance, the whole place bursting into laughter and that particular poem brought alive by a simple dramatization. McGough's spirit came through and connected with us, the audience.

Today, all the readings talk about texts. Texts that are read or are waiting to be read aloud.

Before I get into that, since this is the start of Year C, which goes through Luke's gospel and today's reading starts with the opening verses of this gospel, where the author tells us why they are writing, I want to say something about the authorship of this good story or gospel. The Wisdom Commentary says that "Luke's interest in presenting an "orderly account" so that his reader (Theophilus or translated "Friend of Creator") can trust

what he's reading" is a red flag. The commentary says, "Luke will be polishing up or idealizing the events, main characters, and the traditions passed on."¹ A podcast I listened to lately pointed out such a difference with the account of Jesus' baptism.² In Mark, the first account, only Jesus saw the heavens open and then heard the voice of Godde speak. The author of Luke had a copy of Mark on his writing desk, but he changed Mark's story so that Luke's version reads like *everyone* there, those followers of John, not just Jesus, heard the voice of Godde speak and saw the Spirit descend like a dove. So the gospels vary according to the intention of the author and also, who the listener is. Whatever the written text, biblical or not, the words themselves and the story told are coloured by 1) who the author is, 2) by who is reading the text aloud, and 3) by the listener who connects their own life with the story.

The people in the first reading have just come out of decades of exile. The delivery by Nehemiah and Ezra is set up and intended for everyone who can hear and understand. This reading is a time for articulating who they are as a people. It is emotional and the priest's voice and the content stirs the people to tears. They have re-connected with their story and their Godde. And that is deeply moving.

In the second reading we hear John's vision, and there are also tears. The scroll is silent, because no one is found worthy to

¹ Barbara Reid and Shelly Matthews, *Wisdom Commentary Volume 43A, Luke 1-9* ed. Amy-Jill Levine (Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press) 2021, 3.

² John Edwards interview with Megan Lewis, "The Scholar and the Savior: Bridging Belief and Critical Study" on *Misquoting Jesus Podcast with Bart Ehrman*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNUJa3AurM8>

read it. As the visionary searches for someone to open it and comes up empty handed, he is overcome with sadness, and weeps. What is being held back? This word of life is being held back and that's too much to bear. He senses, I think, an energy of vitality in those words in that scroll, words of life, that are dormant under their seven seals.

I'm reminded of the treaties. So many of us have not heard them read – they were read aloud at the time of agreement so that all parties could be in agreement, with First Nations an equal partner with the new comers through a translator. And now, recent scholarship³ shows that the phrasing which was then written down for the record, was not exactly what was spoken. A sentence in Treaty 6 says that the land was surrendered. But a copy of found, written by one the translators as his own record does not contain that phrasing although everything else is there. So how will the treaties be heard now and understood? I ask this just like John asking how will this scroll of life be opened? It is with the spirit the truth of Christ. An elder tells John and there is someone and so there is a happy breakthrough. Someone who connects truthfully with the wisdom, can proclaim it.

And that is the very scene in the temple on that Sabbath, in Nazareth, when Jesus reads from Isaiah. Jesus is a living testament to the words on the page. Like Roger McGough – what he reads comes alive. Like Hon. Murray Sinclair who quoted the treaties and the Indian Act, and brought words alive with his

³ Sheldon Krasowski, “Coffee Club – The Spirit and Intent of Treaties 1-7” interview with Karla Rasmussen, October 25, 2022 based on his book, *No Surrender: The Land Remains Indigenous*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpEev3Py-TU>.

own life experience, Jesus connects. And Jesus identifies with this text of setting people free. Like Sinclair, & McGough his listeners are riveted by his voice proclaiming these words of healing, freedom, and life.

Prophetic words read aloud in the spirit of truth are powerful. 2025 is a jubilee year, says Pope Francis—a year of hope, and yet, in world events of war and political tyranny, it feels like a year of captivity.

QUESTIONS: So today, whose are the voices you have heard, that bring hope, freedom, inspiration to the words of truth that they speak? When has a reading for you—poems, play, prose—been brought to life?