

## Getting Ready description: February 2009

### Jesus Justice Jazz

Why were these words—*Jesus Justice Jazz*—chosen as our [theme](#) for the 2009 ELCA Youth Gathering? We believe in a God who continues to create a future for us. Without God's future, our present is simply a dead-end with no offer of hope. Throughout scripture you will find stories of God creating a future for God's people. New Orleans has a rich past, we explored that somewhat together last month, but some wonder if it has a future, leaving many trapped in what seems to be a dead-end present. However, God's Spirit seems to be moving among the people of New Orleans (regardless of their faith traditions) and empowering them with hope for the future. They are not dwelling on the past nor are they trapped in the present. They hear God's promise of a future and they are walking towards it with hands held and voices raised. We are being invited into this future.

### Jesus

*"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."* ([Luke 4:18](#))

These are the words Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah as he stood in front of the synagogue in his hometown. In a sense, it is his mission statement, what he will do over the next few years. **Throughout the rest of Luke's gospel we see Jesus setting us free, physically and spiritually.** We see Christ setting New Orleans free as well.

Although there is a fair share of bad news in New Orleans, there is also the good news of Christ's presence with those who suffer. Christ suffers with the poor, the homeless, the jobless, and the distraught as the Body of Christ joins with people in their suffering. **It is for this that Christ has set us free.**

Release is being proclaimed in New Orleans while people are at the same time still being oppressed and held captive by poverty, unjust political systems, and corrupt business practices. Freedom in Christ is proclaimed as individuals receive assistance, as congregations break bread together, as systems are challenged, and as stories are told and heard. **It is for this that Christ has set us free.**

Sight is restored as those who refuse to see the suffering of humanity look squarely into New Orleans' eyes and see her weep. Sight is restored as those who cannot see beyond their dead-end present are given a glimpse of the future in profound and mundane ways. **It is for this that Christ has set us free.**

Christ draws us into these moments of good news, release, recovery, and freedom not as an opportunity to prove our faith or because we owe Christ anything, but because when Christ sets us free from sin he binds us to himself. Being bound together as Christ's body, we find ourselves wrapped up in this work of Christ. This happens when we are at home and when we are away. **It is for this that Christ has set us free, to serve our neighbor.**

[Take some time to listen to this [interview](#) (mp3) from [Grace Matters](#) with Rev. Patrick Keen from Bethlehem Lutheran Church in New Orleans to get a better idea of the suffering that exists and how Christ is present.]

## Justice

*“... and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” ([Micah 6:8](#))*

Jesus sets us free to serve our neighbor. The ongoing ministry of Jesus (bringing good news, proclaiming release, recovering sight, setting the oppressed free and proclaiming God’s favor) continues today and draws us into acts of **compassionate justice**. It is what we were created to do ([Ephesians 2:8-10](#))! We hear this clearly in the Micah text above, but we also hear two other commands: to love kindness and to walk humbly. One can work for justice in ways that are not kind or humble. (*Take some time to think of some examples of this.*)

We will be overwhelmed by the kindness of the folks who call New Orleans home and we will respond by offering kindness in return. Working for justice does not include arriving in New Orleans with our own agenda of what should happen, but it does include walking humbly with Christ into this place with a willingness to extend our love of kindness in whatever ways are needed. It is for this that Christ has set us free, for planned and spontaneous acts of compassionate justice. A woman I met in New Orleans has a teenage son who drives 90 minutes one way to school each day. His family had to move out of the city but he wanted to graduate from his old school. She said, “When you meet kids in New Orleans, don’t ask about Hurricane Katrina first. First, ask them how to peel a crawfish.”

## Jazz

*“In [Louis] Armstrong’s work there is a new kind of confidence that had never existed in Western music, an aural proof that man can master time through improvisation, that contemplation and action needn’t be at odds.”<sup>1</sup>*

*“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*  
([1 Corinthians 12:7](#))

Contemplation and action needn’t be at odds. Jesus sets us free to serve our neighbor by using our gifts to meet their needs. Our contemplation of Christ’s love, our contemplation of our gifts, and our contemplation of our neighbors’ needs becomes our action on behalf of our neighbor.

**Just like Louis Armstrong, we improvise!**

New Orleans is known for Jazz. Jazz was born there. Jazz is known for improvisation. The freedom we experience in Christ opens our ears so we are truly able to improvise as our gifts are made manifest in accompanying those around us. **There is not one right way to live the Christian life; we improvise as we follow the Spirit and as we listen closely to the needs of our neighbor.** This helps us find the part we are to play in the jam session of life.

Contemplation and action are cyclical. Contemplating Christ’s endless love for us draws us deeply into meaningful action on behalf of our neighbor and acting on behalf of our neighbor draws us into a deeper sense of Christ’s endless love for us. Quite often this meaningful action is mundane, and rarely does it involve actions we’ve planned in advance. If I want to help you according to my plan and agenda, then I’m not really serving you—I’m serving my own agenda.

In New Orleans, compassionate justice will involve individuals and groups recognizing that their manifestation of the Spirit is truly for the common good, and then these individuals and groups will begin to improvise as needs arise. There is no “job description” for living out one’s gifts, simply a call to improvise responsively as we hear the pains, sufferings, melodies, and harmonies offered up by those around us.

This is the **Jazz of Justice** for which **Jesus** has set us free.

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<sup>1</sup>Crouch, Stanley. *Considering Genius: Writings on Jazz*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2006, pg. 193.