Take a listen to this:

That was the sound of a shofar, a rams horn, traditionally played on the 10th day of the seventh month to signal the day of Atonement. Each 50 years in Israel this trumpet blast would signal the beginning of the year of Jubilee. Here’s the scriptural reference from the book of Leviticus, which reads:

8-12 “Count off seven Sabbaths of years—seven times seven years: Seven Sabbaths of years adds up to forty-nine years. Then sound loud blasts on the ram’s horn on the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement. Sound the ram’s horn all over the land. Sanctify the fiftieth year; make it a holy year. Proclaim freedom all over the land to everyone who lives in it—a Jubilee for you: ....13 “In this year of Jubilee everyone returns home to his family property.

14-17 “If you sell or buy property from one of your countrymen, don’t cheat him. Calculate the purchase price on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee. He is obliged to set the sale price on the basis of the number of harvests remaining until the next Jubilee. ....Don’t cheat each other. Fear your God. I am God, your God (Lev 25).

Today, this Second Sunday in Creation Season we pause to celebrate and remember the land. This year I want to talk about the concept of Jubilee because Jubilee, the biblical mandate that each fifty years the land would be redistributed back to it’s original occupants, is based in the idea that the land is the possession of Yahweh, which makes those of us who live on the land merely temporary tenants. The bottom line is that the land that we think we own for our ourselves - we don’t. Furthermore, each 50 years the nation is called to re-shuffle occupation of the land back to the original allocation.

Could anything be further from our American notion of capitalism? Could anything be further away from our nation’s core economic structural concept about property ownership, inherited wealth, work hard, pull yourself up by your bootstraps stratifying of society? Imagine this: You’ve worked hard to pay off your 30 year mortgage. Then, in the 31st year it is the Year of Jubilee. You have to pick up your stuff and move back to wherever you came from and someone else gets your house.

Jubilee also applied to erasing debts and liberating people from slavery.

Frankly, I can’t decide if that’s good or bad. I guess for some people it’d be good; for others, bad. If you’re feeling anxious about this Jubilee thing here’s the good news - this scripture only applies to the twelves tribes of Israelites living in the land of Israel. So, you, 21st c Americans, are under no obligation to give back your land every 50 years.

Except…… except you and I know the scriptures are not going to let us get away that scot-free. ‘Cause, you see, the point of Jubilee is that the concept of economic justice is hardwired into the scriptures. Economic justice is hardwired into how God has crafted the ongoing operation of Creation.

It is hardware this way and the Jubilee reset occurs because, you see, God knew that people would take advantage of each other in unscrupulous ways. God knew that John Doe would lie in
order to amass more and more land; that Jane Doe would cheat in order to accumulate more and more slaves. And God knew that eventually people would forget that the land is God’s land, that the land was provided to the people through the generous work of God.

God knew that eventually people would start to think that all this amassed land and accumulated slaves, all these fields of cattle and barns piled high with grain, and 401(k)s fat with stock values - God knew that people would start to think that this was all accumulated solely through their own efforts, their own ingenuity, their own hard work. God knew that people would fall into thinking that “those people don’t deserve as much wealth as I have because they didn’t work as hard as me” - forgetting that ingenuity and force of life comes from God. God knew that we would fool ourselves into thinking we started out in the batter’s box, when in fact we’d were born on second base. God knew that through our egoistic forgetfulness we would create societal castes, devising social systems of us and them, haves and have nots.

And so God builds, hardwires into scripture, into the Word of God for the People of God, God builds into the Word a mandate for economic justice - Jubilee - the giant economic reset which keeps any one group from having too much land, from having too many slaves, from having too much money. Jubilee takes all these things of God and uses them to liberate the people of God - because after all, all the land, and money, and people, and grain piled high in the barns - everything, everything that is, is God’s for the fulfillment of the dream of God.

We are just given stewardship over these things as a tool to care for the creation of God, as tools to make manifest the dream of God. Jubilee is the reminder that the land of God is not for our benefit alone, but the land is the means God gives us to care for all the people of God. The land is about economic justice for all God’s children - Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. The land is about the Kingdom of God.

And so you see, Jubilee is not just an ancient story for a people living in ancient times. Listen to this:

Jesus, had just returned from forty days in the desert and now was sitting in the synagogue in Nazareth. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written (and said):

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him….“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,” Jesus said.
“The year of the Lord’s favor” is the Hebrew reference for Jubilee. Jesus the Christ, God in human flesh, launches Jubilee. “Today,” Jesus says, “Jubilee is fulfilled in your hearing” - a giant reset - the giantest reset of all: good news for the poor, liberty for the enslaved, sight for those who can not see (physically and spiritually), freedom for the oppressed, forgiveness, release, for those enslaved to sin. Jesus’ intent is to launch a social system of people who would live every day as Jubilee day. We are that system of people called into living as Jubilee.

Perhaps this is what is at the heart of the Eucharist, communion. Stick with me here, ‘cause I’m gonna go a bit metaphysical. If Jesus himself is the fulfillment of Jubilee - the Good News of the giant reset - and the intent of Jesus is build a gathered group of people who live each day as Jubilee day in order to make manifest the Kingdom of God on earth - then when Jesus says “this is my body, this is my blood” take my body into your body, take my blood into your blood - isn’t Jesus inviting us to both experience Jubilee for ourselves and be Jubilee for the world? By consuming the Christ, we become what we eat - Jubilee.

For ourselves Jesus invites us into the sure and certain knowledge that we are a people released from captivity to sin. Right? Isn’t that what Jesus the Christ in human flesh proclaims when he says “Today, the scripture is fulfilled”? By taking Jubilee into ourselves we become reset. We become Jubilee. Good News.

And, by taking Jubilee - the body of Christ - into ourselves we are also called into being Jubilee for the world. We are called to be the Body of Christ in our human flesh to bring about “good news for the poor;” to help the spiritually blind and the the physically blind see; to set the oppressed free by dismantling the societal systems that exploit and subjugate many of God’s people. We are called to make tangible the Kingdom of God with the resources of Creation.

By taking Jubilee into ourselves - “This is my body; this is my blood” - isn’t Jesus inviting us to literally be the blast of the shofar, the ram’s horn, sounding out to the world Jubilee! Jubilee! Jubilee! Reset! Reset! Reset! Justice! Justice! Justice! Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!