

Weekend of Sunday, January 27, 2019
3rd Sunday after the Epiphany/Lectionary 3/Proper 2/Year C

Primary Text: Luke 4:14-21

Sermon Title: “It Is Fulfilled”

Theme

Near the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, he visits his hometown of Nazareth. In the words of Isaiah, he states and claims his identity, purpose, and mission.

Text

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶When 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, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸“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,

¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰And 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. ²¹Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Sermon

Just prior to this reading Jesus completed his forty-days in the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil himself. Having come through that, Luke wrote that Jesus was “filled with the power of the Spirit” and began his public ministry. Now Galilee is not a specific place – it is a territory, and one of the bigger cities in the territory of Galilee is Nazareth. Nazareth is the town where Jesus grew up – just how long he lived there is unclear – but he considered it his hometown and the townspeople recognized him as one of their own, as is made clear by their later comments.

Jesus’ public ministry obviously started off with promise. Luke wrote that,

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

We should all start our careers with such great reviews. In my second year of seminary, my parent’s church in Ft. Wayne, which for the record was never my home church, invited me to preach there about once a month. I could never just go and preach without my grandmother and my aunts and uncles and cousins showing up. I didn’t need that pressure. I was honing my craft.

I remember this one sermon I preached where I sat an empty chair next to me and had a one-way conversation with Peter – yes, Peter the disciple. I am still famous for that sermon – they call it the “Duane talks with his imaginary friend” sermon. I really preached some duzi’s back then. But yet, the congregation seemed to always be supportive and complementary. If they would have been honest I might never have been able to go back!

Well, Jesus was smart to begin outside his own hometown as well. By the time he did make his way to Nazareth, he reputation preceded him. Nazareth was abuzz about one of their own making such big news. Luke didn't say so, but I wonder if the Galileans were already asking themselves if Jesus could be the long awaited messiah.

Anyway, come the Sabbath, Jesus made his way to the local synagogue, ¹⁶"as was his custom" - please note that regular attendance at worship was Jesus’ custom. On

this particular occasion Jesus was given the honored opportunity to read and expound on the scripture. He stood up and read from Isaiah 61:

¹⁸“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,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Those in attendance have probably heard it many times before. You have heard it many times, and when I read it for you a moment ago, or any scripture for that matter, you don't confuse me as the voice of the writer. On the contrary, I am merely the reader, the proclaimer. And then, if a sermon follows, I expound on the text I just read. That is how it is done. And that is how it was done in Jesus' day too.

Filled with anticipation, they wondered, what would young Jesus, son of Joseph the carpenter, say to expound on this text? Jesus rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant and sat down (sitting in those days, was the traditional posture of the teacher). Luke wrote, “The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.” Then amidst great anticipation Jesus said,

²¹“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

What? That’s it? Well, they mouthed some nice words, perhaps about the way he read so well – what else could they say? His sermon was nine words long!

Last weekend was the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and for the first fifteen years of my public ministry, serving Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Cortland (aka the little church up north), I would participate in the local ministerial's pulpit exchange. Over those fifteen years I've preached in a Roman Catholic church a couple of times, a Methodist church a couple of times, a non-denominational church a couple of times, and a couple of times each at the two Disciples of Christ churches and a couple of times at the local Nazarene church.

Most of those churches are mainline denomination churches and so the expectation of preaching was pretty much what I was used to – a twelve to fifteen minute sermon and done. Well, apparently that is not the expectation at the Nazarene church, because after a few minutes of singing and praying and the making of announcements, I got up in the pulpit and read the scripture reading that I was going to preach on while they all got their personal Bibles out along with their highlighters and note pads.

I read the scripture and preached my twelve to fifteen minute sermon and sat down – and there was dead silence. An elder came up and whispered in my ear, "Are you done already?" "Yes" I whispered back. And then he stood up in front of the congregation and said, "Thank you Pr. Jesse for bringing us that *brief* word. We won't have to wait in line at the local restaurants today!" I later found out that their pastor would rail on for forty-five minutes. That was their expectation!

Jesus too, had just gotten done with the shortest sermon his fellow Nazarites had ever heard. They tried to find something nice to say about his performance, but inside their hearts they were disturbed. "Why?" you ask. That is a story for next week.

Are you ready for another one of my axioms about ministry? Here it comes:

"With knowledge comes responsibility."

Take the First Reading for today. The Israelites have returned from their Babylonian Exile and have rebuilt the Temple, but over the many years of their exile they have forgotten their purpose as God's people and what God required of them. And so Ezra, one of the few remaining priests took a scroll containing the Law of Moses and read it to the people in the presence of Nehemiah, their governor. And when they heard what was required of them, they, altogether wept and humbled themselves before the LORD, and recommitted themselves to living godly lives.

You see, with knowledge comes responsibility. Before Ezra read the Law of Moses and told them about their chosen status and the mighty signs and wonders that God had performed to save them from being wiped out in the past, they were ignorant about who and what they were. But then, being reminded, they wept, humbled

themselves, confessed the error of their ways, and re-committed themselves to live godly lives.

So what's the point? I am so glad you asked.

Here during the season of Epiphany, we expect Gospel Readings that reveal who Jesus is.

At his baptism ^{Luke 3:21-22}the heaven was opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

And then last week we found Jesus and his family and his disciples at a wedding. There he turned water into wine, and as I told you last week, that was no party trick but a powerful sign on the new thing God was about to do. John wrote,

John 2:11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

And here this week we find Jesus beginning his ministry in his own hometown of Nazareth. I'll say more about this next week when the Gospel Reading is the conclusion of this reading, but here is the point for today:

- Jesus *is* the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One.
- God himself called him his own Son and the Beloved.
- So far, in his public ministry, he has demonstrated that he has the power of God at his disposal,
- and so when he has a word to say *about anything*, God loving and seeking people ought to listen.

And what God revealed in Jesus Christ has to say, may hurt our feelings, but that doesn't change the fact that he is God revealed in Jesus Christ!

He may demand we prune some bad behaviors. We may have to change our attitudes and become more like him. And we should do what he teaches because he is God revealed in Jesus Christ!

Let me ask you a question. Wouldn't you rather know what Jesus has to say about godly living than not know? Like the ancient Israelites, with knowledge comes responsibility.

You can choose not to listen to him. You can choose not to believe in him. And you can choose to reject him. But your poor choices doesn't make him any less the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

My "Raisin' the Bar Challenge" this week is to think long and hard about this teaching and ask yourself,

"Am I going to risk eternal life with God and all the saints because of my own stubbornness and desire to go my own way?"

"Am I going to pick and choose my way through this temporal life and the teachings of the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God and do what I want to do?"

These responses do not seem to me to be the way to honor God and the sacrifice of his Son. A better way, would be like the ancient Israelites, who, once they knew better, made a decision to do better. And for us to know better means to know the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God as he is revealed in scripture.

Prayer

Loving, obedient, teaching Jesus, send your Spirit to guide us in the way you would have us go, and inspire to come to know you better. And then knowing better, help us to do better. This we pray in your name. Amen