

+ Luke 4:14-21 + The Word Reveals the Word + 3rd Sunday after Epiphany + 27 January 2013 +

“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Did the people sitting in synagogue that day really understand what was happening right before their eyes? Did they really understand who that was standing before them? Yes, they all thought they knew who he was, but none of them knew who he was.

The hometown boy who had become a rabbi had finally come home to be the guest preacher in synagogue that day. There was so much anticipation in little Nazareth. Nothing great and no one great had ever come from there before, but they had Jesus, the rabbi about whom everyone was talking. It seemed like Jesus was lighting the world on fire. His reputation grew with every visit to a village or synagogue. He had changed water into wine. Rumor had it that he had won a three-round fight with the devil in the Judean wilderness. Jesus had ***“returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit”***. He was healing people with every kind of disease. He was like a prophet of old ***“and everyone praised him”***. Whispers were growing louder that this Jesus might even be God’s long-promised Messiah, God’s Anointed, the fulfillment of all the ancient prophecies.

To the people of Nazareth, however, Jesus was the carpenter’s son, ***“Joseph’s son”*** (Luke 4:22) and Mary’s too. Many had known him as a child growing up in poverty in that backwater town. Some had grown up with Jesus. Some still had their doubts about him as they did the math in their heads figuring out when he was born and when his parents were married. Everyone thought they knew who Jesus was, but really no one knew him at all.

Jesus was back home, maybe even visiting family and old friends. ***“On the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.”*** As he had done countless times before, Jesus went to the synagogue for worship. This time he’d be the guest preacher. At the appointed time in the service, Jesus ***“stood up to read.”*** The synagogue leader handed him a scroll with the prophecy of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. Jesus unrolled it to the appointed reading for that day. ***“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”***

Jesus ***“rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down”***, as was the custom for preaching in those days. The people waited with baited breath to hear what the son of their town would have to say about this familiar prophecy from Scripture. What wisdom would flow from his lips? What insights would he bring to such familiar words? What conclusions would he share? You could’ve heard a pin drop in the synagogue. ***“The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him...”***

Luke doesn’t tell us much about Jesus’ first sermon in his hometown, but he does give us Jesus’ introduction. ***“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*** Of all the pearls of wisdom, all the insights, all the conclusions that could’ve come out of Jesus’ mouth that Sabbath, no one expected him to say that. “On this day in this place what I have just read has finally been fulfilled.” Essentially Jesus was telling these familiar people, “I am God’s chosen one, his Anointed, the long-promised Messiah. I always have been and always will be.” Did the people wonder at what he meant?

The people were impressed with the rest of his ***“gracious words”*** (Luke 4:22), but did they really pay attention to what Jesus had to say? Did they realize what was happening right before their eyes? Did they realize who Jesus was or did they see him merely as the hometown boy made good and nothing more than that? Did they realize that the Word of God revealed the Word made flesh?

Sadly, the answer is no. They failed to see who Jesus really was. They didn’t pay attention to what was actually happening in their midst. Unlike so many others in Galilee, they didn’t rejoice over this One who really was God’s Anointed, the Messiah. The rest of the account shows us how badly they failed. Before we look down on those people of Nazareth, though, the same question begs to be asked of you and me. When you and I see Jesus revealed in his Word, do we realize who he is or are we really no different than the citizens of lowly Nazareth failing to see the real Jesus?

We all have certain pictures of Jesus. We read about him or hear about him in Holy Scripture and different pictures come to mind, perhaps from Sunday School, perhaps from Christian art you’ve seen, perhaps from your own imagination. Some of those pictures are particularly comforting and meaningful at certain times in our lives—a picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd cradling a lamb, a picture of Christ crucified on the cross, a picture of Jesus calming a furious storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Sometimes, often unintentionally, you and I tend to only think of Jesus in that way. Sometimes you see Jesus as merely a nice picture on the wall that makes you smile, but really has no active part in your life outside of the four walls of this church. Sometimes you rush across a section of Scripture describing who Jesus is or what he has done, and you take him for granted. You might think, “Oh, that’s nice. That makes me smile, but I’ll probably forget about it by the time I get home from church.” Could it be that you and I, who have benefited from the blessings of

Christ's coming for so long, are no different than those smiling, happy people in Nazareth who just couldn't see Jesus for who he really was? Could it be that because we take him for granted, we don't appreciate what he has so graciously done for us? He's Jesus. He's our Savior from sin and given us heaven, but how often don't we fail to rejoice because we don't see how that matters for our lives right now?

That has an impact on how you and I view God's Word too. We read his Word or hear his Word or study his Word as if it's our duty to God, something we have to do for God rather than something God does for us. We see God's Word as great to have when you're at death's door, but not really all that relevant or applicable or necessary for my daily life after I go home from here. When you think about it, isn't it amazing that God doesn't just reject us here and now because each of us so easily fails to see Jesus for who he really is and his Word for what it really is, for taking them both for granted?

...But Jesus loves you and me too much to let that happen to us right now. Sometimes he has to be very simple and very clear for you and me to actually "get it". **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."** The Word reveals the Word made flesh. That's what the people of Nazareth were never able to see, but it's an opportunity of God's gracious love that he allows you and me to see that with eyes and ears of faith right here and now.

Did you ever think about how jaw-droppingly amazing it is that Jesus fulfills every prophecy written on the pages of Sacred Scripture? A man by the name of Peter Stoner once did a study of the mathematical probability of one person fulfilling just eight Old Testament prophecies. The chance of that happening is 1 in 10¹⁷ or 1 with 17 zeroes after it. That's like taking that many silver dollars and covering the face of Texas, which would cover the entire state two feet deep in silver dollars. You mark one silver dollar and then mix up the whole bunch. Then you blindfold a man and tell him he can travel as far as he wishes, but that he eventually has to pick up one and say it's the right one. His chance of picking the right silver dollar would be the same as one person fulfilling just eight of the ancient Old Testament prophecies. That's almost beyond our comprehension, but that's exactly what Jesus did and so much more. As we see the Word made flesh revealed time and again on the pages of Holy Scripture, we see God's plan, God's purpose, God's design in sending a very real, very specific Savior.

Jesus reveals exactly that with the prophecy of Isaiah 61. These verses would've been very familiar to his hearers. We sometimes hear them during the preparatory weeks of Advent, but in them we see the Word made flesh revealed by the Word of God. **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me..."** The Christ, the Messiah would be **"anointed"**, specially chosen by God to carry out several important tasks.

That included **"preaching good news to the poor"**. Isn't that word "poor" an accurate, but unsettling description of what each of us is spiritually? Regardless of where you're at economically, every one of us is spiritually **"poor"** before the holy God. Before God, we have nothing to offer, except the filthy, tattered rags of our personal sins. By nature, each of us is a "beggar" who desperately needs the **"good news"** of the Messiah. So here he comes cleansing you with his forgiveness and covering you with the holiness he gives you through your Baptism.

He comes **"to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed"**. It's like you were a death row inmate whose time has come for execution. As you're prepared for execution, the clock ticks down to the very moment when it's supposed to take place. Suddenly the phone rings. The guard notifies you that the governor has pardoned you. You're released from the execution chamber free at last. Christ's coming is like that governor's pardon releasing you from certain death in hell. Jesus shatters the chains of your guilt. He pours light into the dark blindness of your despair and brings you peace and real freedom for your soul. Sin no longer has control over your life. Satan no longer oppresses you. Death no longer intimidates you. The Word of God reveals that the Word became flesh to set you free for eternity.

Jesus also comes **"to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"**. Rather than give you just another reason to simply smile at another passing picture of Jesus, he brings real joy, a real reason to celebrate even in the midst of hardship or suffering or pain or loss or grief. When Jesus came to fulfill all those promises, he came to make your life into one great year of jubilee, of celebration, of joy in the Word made flesh revealed on the pages of Holy Scripture.

"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." You need Jesus and you need to see him revealed in his glory on the pages of his Word. When you see that, then you finally realize how much the Word of God needs to have a place not just in your life here at church, but in every day, in every place of your life. Jesus fulfilled every one of those promises, so what does that mean for you here and now? Live as those who rejoiced because they realized who Jesus really was—not the hometown hero made good, but God's Anointed, the Word made flesh, to change your life and mine. See Jesus for who he really is and then take that with you when you leave here today. Then share that with someone you know so they too can see the Savior whom God has so graciously revealed right here in his Word. Amen.