

“Fulfillment”

Preached by Pastor Brahm Semmler Smith on January 6, 2019.

Based on Luke 4:14-21

Sisters and brothers in Christ, during this season of Epiphany, may the light of Christ light our paths and remind us of God’s great love for us. Amen.

This past fall, I joined our 9th grade students and their parents in a visit to the Temple Sholom here in Eau Claire. Our host, Sue, graciously shared with us aspects about her faith that were important for her. One of the things she showed us were the scrolls. The scrolls carry with them the scriptures for the Jewish people, and are a central part of their worship. The scrolls in Temple Sholom are kept in an area in the front of the worship space, in the wall behind some closed doors, kind of back behind the altar area here at Trinity. And during worship, these doors would be opened, the scroll brought out, and it would be used to share the word of God that day to the gathered people.

When I read our scripture readings for today, my mind went to our visit at the synagogue and these sacred scrolls. Because that is the setting we find Jesus today in the Gospel of Luke. We are in a synagogue with a rabbi reading scrolls.

But it isn’t just any synagogue, and this just isn’t any rabbi who has come to read the scrolls. This is Jesus. And Jesus is in his hometown of Nazareth.

Imagine you are there. Nazareth is this small town, one that resembles nothing like the modern version of this city. We had a two part course in December with Harry Jol on Biblical archaeology, and I was struck by how small the actual footprint of Nazareth was during Jesus’ time. It’s a tiny little town compared to the big city of Jerusalem, 90 miles away. A village of a couple hundred people up in the hills.

And you show up to the synagogue, and there’s this rabbi on the scene- a hometown kid, the carpenter’s son, Jesus. But there is some buzz around Jesus. He was baptized by John in the Jordan, then disappeared into the wilderness, alone for over a month. When he showed up again, there was no other way to describe it, than he is filled with power of the Holy Spirit. He’s been traveling about, teaching about God’s Kingdom and has begun to gain quite a following. Now, he’s come home, to the small town of Nazareth. It’s Sabbath day, worship—he stands up to be the reader in front of his home congregation:

[[Jesus] 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.”20

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the place was on him, intent. So Jesus added, “You’ve just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place.”

Jesus says, Here's the deal, this is what I am about. This is what God is about: it's about bringing good news to the poor, releasing the captives, recovery of sight for the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Today. Not in the future. Not God will bring good news to the poor, release the captives, sight to the blind, oppressed to go free, the year of the Lord's favor sometime in the far off future. This isn't a future tense he tells them. But in him, in Jesus Christ, this is now. This is the time. This is the place.

And when he says today, today this is true, he puts us in the midst of this action of God. Diana Butler Bass says this "Today" emphasis is the radical part of Jesus coming into our midst. That rather than a God who is far off and distant, God is here, today. Fulfilling the scriptures of Isaiah. "Today" places *us* in the midst of the sacred drama, reminding us that we are not just watchers of God's desire for this world, but that we have roles to play and the ability to help live out God's desire for this world. We are God's hands and feet. We have God's heart in Jesus in our midst. All because Jesus told us that God's fulfillment of these promises in scripture is today. In Him. In his presence. God's love for the world is now. Jesus essentially told his friends and family and neighbors, "Look around. See the Spirit of God at work, right here. Right now. God is *with us*."

The time is now. God's reign is here. And in these actions, whenever we see the good news brought to the poor, the captives release, the blind see, the oppressed go free, this is the work of Jesus in our midst.

The Spirit was upon Jesus. But it was also upon his friends and neighbors, too. Which is maybe why he read these scriptures in his hometown of Nazareth. For Jesus was one of them. Jesus transformed Isaiah's words, Isaiah's prophecy, into a powerful invitation for the whole community to act on behalf of God's justice. With this in mind, Butler Bass suggests that the text might have been read:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me (and therefore also with you),
because he has anointed us
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent us 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.

Jesus is asking his hometown to open their eyes, to see God at work in the world. To see more deeply God's presence in our world, past the sin and hardship, trials and tribulations of our world to the reality that love and compassion we find in God is the foundation of everything else in our world. That when we recognize this grace, when we can take time to see and experience this love through Jesus Christ, then our fear recedes, our hatred melts, and our tit for tat way of looking at the world falls to the wayside. God is with us. In the face of everything else, God is with us. That is the reality that Jesus proclaims to us this morning. And in it we find fulfillment. Fulfillment from a God who loves us so greatly to come to us in Jesus.

It is a reality that Trinity tries to live out in our life together. When we say that we “Serve in Christ’s love and share the good news,” this passage of Jesus comes front and center. Because we are Jesus’ neighbors and friends, and we are people of Jesus, we put in front of us this mission that proclaims we are here: it's about bringing good news to the poor, releasing the captives, recovery of sight for the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Through feeding the hungry, walking with the homeless, teaching our youth and children about God’s love for them, singing out hymns at the funerals of the saints, being a listening shoulder for the ones who need to vent and talk.

In 2019, may Jesus’ promise of fulfillment and call for us to recognize and live out God’s presence in this world be forefront in our mission together. May we live in the today, recognizing Jesus’ reign and time is now, here, with us.