

## Live in the promise Today: Luke 4:14-21

*This sermon was preached by Pastor Heather Wigdahl on January 24, 2010 at Trinity Lutheran Church.*

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

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

<sup>18</sup>'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,

<sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

<sup>20</sup>And 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. <sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God!**

Grace and peace to you this day, in the name of our Lord and savior, Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

*I have a bit of a riddle for you:*

What is something in your life that is so unique, such that there has never been another just like it and there will never be another just like it ever again? To paraphrase Frederick Buechner, it is the *point* your past has been leading you to, since the moment of your birth, and the point from which all your tomorrows will proceed until the hour of your death. The answer, anyone?

**Today** is where we always find ourselves—even when our minds are elsewhere. Isn't that true often, for us? It is for me. I reflect a lot. I think and plan for the future. Yet *this* moment, today, is where *we actually are*. Today is where we live.

I have been trying to teach our 3 year old, Eleanor, the concept of "today," and tomorrow and yesterday. Her common refrain is, "is it tomorrow yet?" And then I launch into this whole

explanation of how today means “this day,” we talk days of the week, that tomorrow is Monday, but when Monday comes we will call it “today” and then today will be yesterday, and tomorrow will become Tuesday...and I begin to find myself confused, too. But here we are, Today. This day.

I think a part of living our faith IS grounded in the **past**, our collective story that ties us with those who have gone before us. We learn from the past, hopefully to make us wiser now, more compassionate now. It is equally important to look forward, for isn't HOPE a forward looking thing? We believe that God IS at work in us, and that means God is moving us in a direction of some sort. So it is important, too, to look forward. But TODAY is where we live.

And TODAY is not *unlike* the day, long ago, we read of in our gospel, where, in little town called Nazareth, a community gathered in their synagogue to listen to Jesus. It was Jesus' hometown he had returned to. There had been reports about him—rumors—that had been spreading throughout the country—stories of his healings and miracles, stories of his rather **bold** teaching. So, when he came back **home**, everybody was there, eager to hear the local boy who'd been making a name for himself.

In the synagogue, Jesus is handed a bulky scroll; He unrolls it and reads aloud, what were *familiar* words, from the prophet Isaiah:

*“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.”*

Finished with these few verses, he rolls up the scroll, returns it to the attendant, and takes his seat. It was the custom for teachers to sit, rather than stand, so when Jesus sits, everyone looks at him, expecting some commentary, some **explication** of this text—a sermon.

**But what Jesus says is not the appropriate response—not** even in the realm of what anyone expected. They *expected* to hear of a Messianic promise—something **far off**, something far in the future. **But Jesus' sermon begins with the word "Today."**

**-- Today this scripture is fulfilled.**

**-- Today the Spirit of the Lord is here.**

**-- Today I bring good news to the poor.**

**TODAY. Not tomorrow, not yesterday, not some day. But today.**

By the way, it was a very short sermon (mine will be a bit longer)—but short as it was, it was NOT the correct response. Jesus names himself and his ministry as the fulfillment of God's promise. Jesus speaks of grace—for sinners, for outcasts, even for non-Jews, and those gathered took offense. Such that, as we will hear next week—part 2 really of this story—Jesus is literally run out of his hometown.

“Today”, Jesus says. (Not tomorrow, not yesterday, not some day, but today). It would have been *nice* to think of the prophets words coming to pass in some rosy, distant future. It would have been *nice* to just reflect on those giants of faith: Abraham, Sarah, Moses, David—who all encountered God Almighty. But surely not NOW?! Not US?! THAT would require some kind of response; some sort of action.

Jesus proclaims WHO he is. He proclaims who he has come into the world to BE, *and* who he calls his followers to *become*, too.

Jesus would bring *good news* to poor people like the hungry crowds on the hillside whom he fed with bread and fish. Jesus would bring release to those held captive: through healing, sometimes physical, but always more importantly, spiritual. Jesus would set people free...Like Zacchaeus, who was held captive by his own greed. Jesus would bring sight to the blind—sometimes literally, but always he opened people’s eyes to look at God in a new and different light. Jesus would bring freedom to the oppressed, like those who were never counted “good enough”, or worthy of being part of the community, let alone worthy of God. Jesus would proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, the great Jubilee that took place every fifty years, where every debt was forgiven, every piece of foreclosed land returned, every slave freed. Jesus would embody that ancient Jubilee—a symbol of God’s forgiveness, and a glimpse of God’s reign.

When Jesus says “the Spirit of the Lord is upon him”, it means God’s *agenda* is HIS agenda too. And, what Jesus begins, *his disciples* will continue: good news to the poor; release to those captive; new eyes to the blind; justice to those oppressed; mercy to the desperate.

Christ brings good news. Christ comes to us in a way which connects with our human need.

- If a woman is dying of cancer, the gospel is God's strong word of resurrection.
- If a person is permeated with guilt, the gospel is God's assurance of forgiveness.
- If people experience extreme suffering, the gospel is presence, God’s and ours. The gospel is our prayers, our love, our service.
- For the starving, the gospel may be bread.
- For a homeless refugee, the gospel may be freedom in a new homeland.
- For earthquake survivors, the gospel is medicine, clean water, *continued* attention.
- For all of us the gospel is welcome and acceptance.

The gospel is never *truth* in a vacuum; it is not a theologically sound statement which may or may not relate to one’s life. **The gospel is God's truth**, God's message, God's **action**, God's *agenda*, God’s word to a particular person, with a particular need, in a particular situation.

You wouldn’t throw a drowning man a sandwich. No matter how good the sandwich might be, it would not meet his need. You gotta get him out of the water first. God’s truth for us meets

our deepest need. God saves us—in the ways we need saving. In fact, the concept of *salvation* in the Bible includes ALL the ways we need to be saved. Salvation is not *just* about heaven. Salvation for us is also about life, here and now. Today. AND God calls **us** to be a saving church, in all the ways people need saving too.

**We are called to be a hope-filled community**—with idealistic and even impossible dreams. God’s agenda will not be perfected or completed through us. There will always be more that needs to be done. But we are called to be part of it. We are called to live in HOPE: For the people of Haiti. For our neighbors who are struggling. For ourselves, in all the ways we fail to live up to our expectations. WE are called to *begin* TODAY, to dream *today*, to imagine *today*, to offer something of ourselves *today*.

When you feel overwhelmed, remember today is the day you can affect. When you feel regretful, remember today is the day you can decide to do something different. Today is where we live.

It is true that Yesterday can seem so glorious; and tomorrow can look so glamorous; while **today** can just feel ordinary. **But** the good news of God comes through common, ordinary ways; and on common, ordinary days, the good news of God in Christ meets us where we are, meets our needs, calls us (be a people who) (to) meet needs too.

When buildings crumble, and hearts break, when we get hurt and do our own hurting, when we’re selfish, or when we feel overlooked, the promise of God in Christ reaches out to us.

Today, here and now. Here as this body of Christ in the world. You know, I find it comforting to know that today, in churches everywhere, someone is reading scripture. Today someone is reading about God who breathes life into us, who calls us by name. Today someone is reading about God who brings life out of death, who claims us as God’s own people. Across oceans, and across the street—we are connected together, and is there not grace in that? Today the scripture is fulfilled in our hearing. The word of the Lord that is Christ **lives** with us. *This* day. So let us rejoice and be glad and go good in it. Amen.