

January 24, 2010
Luke 4: 14-21
Rev. Robin Sherman

Imagine if you came to church one day and I handed you the Bible and said read this and then lead us in a discussion regarding it. What would you do? Run screaming from the room? Take hold of the book and hope it is a passage you know? See it as an opportunity to finally have your say about God?

Chances are you would not be very comfortable with that scenario; but what about if you had done the discernment process, gone away to school and learned more about the Bible and the stories it contains, then come back here, entered this church that you grew up in, saw all the familiar faces and family members that have gathered; could you do it then? What would be expected of you? After all, this crowd loves you already; they remember when you helped with lighting the advent candles, and when you attended VBS. They watched you be confirmed and met your new boyfriend or girlfriend and the next one and the next one. Why Mr. Smith who sits in the back gave you your first job and then let you go when you forgot your shift that one time when you were 16.

At first glance it seems like a wonderful thing to be in front of the hometown crowd and then you start to think about it; the expectations might be a little higher, you might be expected to be really good; you might be expected to say nice things and tell them how great they are; you might be expected to know every answer to every question about religion that there ever was. Not to mention that your parents have to remain here after you go on your way to the next preaching town so you better be good at this preaching thing.

Today's scripture invites us to picture Jesus' return to his hometown where he does what he always did when he was in town, he went to church with the family. Off to the synagogue they go and because the hometown boy who used to read in church is here he is asked to read that day's scripture and to get the discussion going. You see this is what they did in the synagogue. Someone read the scripture and then sat down and began to interpret what was read. Not unlike ministry today where we read the scripture and the minister gives an interpretation of what it means for us today. A slight variation today is that it is not usually an open debate during the sermon although conversation sometimes happens after the service is done; or in the car on the way home.

Today's sermons are a nice thing but they are simply a couple of good stories, an example or two; for the most part they send you away feeling good, re-energising your life, perhaps you go away challenged to do better or to do something with your life and you may have learned something new about scripture or God but for the most part you can take it or leave it, agree with it or not.

You see there is a difference between a sermon and a word from God. A word from God disrupts our lives, shakes us up, even changes us, literally. Truth be told we rarely go home from church having truly heard the word of God! We might go home and say

that was a good service today, but rarely do we say I heard the word of God today. Now that doesn't mean we didn't get anything out of it, I am simply trying to make us aware of the difference between hearing a sermon, and hearing the word of God because in our reading today, the people of Nazareth most likely went to Synagogue expecting a good service, anticipating a discussion that would be uplifting and hopeful to get them through the week and this week they had that guest speaker, Jesus. You remember Jesus, they would have said to one another at the market place, Mary & Joseph's boy. You know he used to work with his Dad and then he went off with that group travelling around with their new ideas about life and YHWY. It should be good, are you going? I'll see you there! You know those conversations.

What they didn't expect was what would follow Jesus reading; the statement he would make that moved this guest appearance from a sermon to a direct word from God.

First of all Jesus read from Isaiah and not from the Torah. The Torah was the 5 books said to have been written by Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These are the books the Jewish people had studied and known best. After the exile, Ezra was asked to bring the books of Moses to the people and to read them and he did, for hours at a time and he made it understandable to them. But on this day Jesus is handed the scroll from Isaiah, the prophet. He opened the scroll and this is what he read:

“The Spirit of God is upon me because the Most High has anointed me; to bring good news to the poor. God has sent me to proclaim liberty to those held captive, recovery of sight to those who are blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of our God's favour.”

Then he closed the scroll and sat down because this was the custom and then to make it understandable, the discussion part of the service he said something like this: “Today in your hearing, this scripture passage is fulfilled.” Jesus has just told the people of Nazareth that the message of the well respected and honoured prophet has been fulfilled right there right then. This is it, here I am, done! Another prophesy come true; a word from God!

Well, next week we will hear what happens after this claim is made but for now, today we have been told. We have been put on notice that the Word of God has been fulfilled; not a sermon about the coming of a saviour, not a discussion about who do we think the anointed one is or when that special one will arrive. Not a sermon about the future of the synagogue or the sustainability of the church. Jesus, that day, gave them the word of God telling them exactly what he has been sent to do as the Son of God.

That day in the synagogue everyone present heard the goals and objectives of the Son of God; in other words what was to be done to continue to fulfill the word of God. This is what God wants Jesus and those hearing the Word to do:

- To bring Good News to the poor
- To proclaim liberty to those held captive
- Recovery of sight to those who are blind
- To release those in prison
- To proclaim the year of our God's favour

The timeframe would be 3 years give or take. God had been turned loose in the world through the hearing of those people that day and continues to be heard today.

You see each time we come to church we should leave having heard, not just a good sermon but the word of God reminding us of the goals and objectives of our gathered community:

To bring Good News to the poor – Jesus told us the poor will always be with us; help them, feed them, clothe them, do not judge them.

To proclaim liberty to those held captive – people being used as slaves, lives discarded for the gain of others, people working and living in subhuman conditions still exist around our globe. We must find ways to set them free from tyrants, governments, and religions that hold people captive through oppression and control.

Recovery of sight to the blind – not the physically blind but those blind to the needs of others, blind to the exploitation of vulnerable people, blind to the ways in which we contribute to racism, sexism, homophobia, global warming, abuse, etc. We turn a blind eye and pretend we do not see or ignore the plight of others.

To release those in prison – the prisons that hold us confined and captive in living fulfilled, abundant lives. Our prisons are full of people whose relationships have been severed by alcohol and drugs; and physical and mental abuse. These prisons are not just the institutions which hold people but also the prisons that hold us prisoners in our own lives – bodies that don't function as well as they used to; fear; hatred; anger; all the things that keep us from living lives of abundance and love. The prisons that leave us unable to be in right relationship with our God, our community, our families.

To proclaim the year of our God's favour – Jubilee. It is Jewish custom from ancient times that every 50 years land is returned to its rightful owner, loans are forgiven, the slate is wiped clean and everyone starts again. Imagine what would happen to the stock market if we did indeed forgive our debts and our debtors as taught from Jesus through Jubilee.

These are the "new" laws brought by Jesus that day in the synagogue – the true Word of God. May these words be fulfilled in your hearing this day.

Amen