

Sermon for January 31, 2016
Luke 4:21-30

Our Gospel reading for today begins where we stopped last week with Jesus saying, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus has given us his mission statement by declaring that God has sent him to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to give sight to the blind, to free the oppressed and proclaimed this to be the year of God’s favor. Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophecy and is the one who is able to give salvation to those who hear him; especially to those who are living in the margins of society.

Jesus has rolled up the scroll, given it back to the attendant, and sat down to teach from the reading. We learn today that **all** respond to his reading with amazement and wonder. At first they were all proud of this hometown boy who has done well. This is not the first time in Luke that people have responded with wonder to news about Jesus. After the shepherds found the babe lying in the manger; they went throughout Bethlehem telling everyone they met about Jesus and everyone responded with wonder. Mary and Joseph respond with wonder to Simeon’s words about Jesus being God’s salvation for both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Wonder and amazement are the proper responses to the good news of God at work in the world through Jesus. Can you hear them? “Wow, that’s great news! Isn’t this Joseph’s son—one of our very own?” But Jesus interrupts all of their praising because he knows them better than they know themselves. He knows their desires and he voices those desires back to them with first a proverbial saying and then with two prophetic stories.

First, Jesus says to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’” Jesus says that they’re telling him that if you are the fulfillment of this amazing good news, then show us the signs to prove it! They want Jesus to do the same miracles in Nazareth that he has done in Capernaum. After all, you are our hometown boy; shouldn’t you do the same things for us—your fellow Jews—that you were doing for the Gentiles living in Capernaum. But Jesus answers them by saying, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s

hometown.” For the first time Jesus is identified in Luke as a prophet, but it will bring rejection instead of acceptance from those who think they know him the best.

One of the reasons that they feel this way is because they are God’s chosen people and shouldn’t these signs be given to them before they’re given to anyone else. So Jesus tells them two stories from their own Scriptures about two of their famous prophets—Elijah and Elisha. Of all the stories about these two Jesus could have picked; he picks the ones about ministry to people who were not part of Israel—people who weren’t chosen. In the same way Jesus implies that his ministry too is for those who are beyond the boundaries of his hometown. Luke is reminding us that Jesus’ saving grace is available to all—both the Jew and the Gentile. As we will hear in a few moments in the words of Institution Jesus says, “This cup is the new covenant shed in my blood for the forgiveness of sin for all people.” Jesus is not a prophet that will only serve the special interests of his hometown, but is a messenger of the good news for the whole world—especially for those living in the margins.

And once again **all** of those listening have the same reaction. They are full of anger! The hometown crowd has listened to Jesus proclaim good news and they want proof that he is the prophet he claims to be; and they react with anger when they hear him saying that his ministry is for all people. The result of that anger—they rise up as a group and try to kill him by hurling him off of a cliff onto the stones below.

But it isn’t his time yet and he is able to pass through their midst and in many ways this hometown visit foreshadows the way that Jesus’ ministry will unfold in the years ahead. Jesus proclaims a kingdom that the poor inherit, in which the hungry will be fed, and in which the rich and full will be pulled down. This will ultimately lead him to the cross and death.

It isn’t any easier for us today to hear the ultimate truth in Jesus’ words than it was for his hometown to hear it those many years ago. Can we accept any easier that God gives the blessings of sun and rain, compassion and care, to all people on earth alike? Can we accept that God’s kingdom of justice, peace, and freedom are not just for the chosen few, but for the

whole human family? Can we accept that God's grace is freely given to both the good and the evil?

But his preaching on this day was also to remind them (and us) of the original purpose of being chosen; to have a special relationship with God—we are to be a light to the rest of the world; to share the blessings of a new way of life with those living in the darkness of oppression, captivity, violence and fear. We have been chosen for a reason—to share God's grace and mercy and love and justice with those around us—no matter who they are. We are called to give water to the thirsty, food to the hungry, welcome to the stranger, shelter to the homeless, and clothing to the naked. We are called to share the blessing of the new life that **we** have been given through Christ's death and resurrection.

During this time of Epiphany it is a good time to re-learn the good news that we profess; a good time to remind ourselves that in Jesus a light has dawned that will never go out. It is a time to reaffirm our hope in the promises of all the good things that God is always working to bring into all of our lives; a time to remind ourselves that the life that God has created and redeemed through Jesus Christ is something to celebrate. It's time to recognize that the grace of God is emerging all around us, bringing freedom and peace and a fresh start for the least and the lost and the left out. But it's also a time to remember that we have received all those blessings of new life for a purpose—not to hoard them, but to share them with everyone we meet.