

3 Epiphany                      Luke 4:14-21  
Christ and Grace              January 27, 2019  
Robin Teasley

In Adult Forum last Sunday, we were comparing and contrasting the Gospels of John and Luke since we read from John last week. Many times the same story is told in more than one gospel and it's always interesting to see the parts of the story that are the same and the parts that change. At other times a story will appear in only one gospel. What we are learning is that each gospel writer was writing in a particular time and place, with particular current events occurring, to meet the particular spiritual needs of the community.

The author might have chosen to include or omit parts of a story to better equip a community to remain strong in the face of persecution, to be more inclusive of others, or to better understand the mission of the Church in that time and place. What is amazing for us is that scripture is the living word, and it continues to meet our particular spiritual needs, to equip us, and to help us understand the mission of the Church today.

In today's Gospel, Luke is noting that the start of Jesus' public ministry and his return to his hometown are under the leadership and power of the Holy Spirit. Throughout Luke's Gospel, it's clear that the new work of God in the world through Jesus is directly connected to the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's almost *too easy* to see the Holy Spirit at work in Luke's Gospel. After Jesus was baptized by John the Baptizer, the Spirit descended on him and a voice came from heaven, "you are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased." The next thing we hear is that Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. Here is where our text begins today – Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee. It is by this power that he began to teach. And then he came to Nazareth. He came home.

Author Thomas Wolfe, in his novel "You Can't Go Home Again", explores this idea of coming home through the character of George Webber, who realizes: "You can't go back home to your family, back home to your childhood ... back home to the old forms and systems of things which once seemed everlasting but which are changing all the time – back home to the escapes of Time and Memory." Jesus must have experienced something of this reality when he returned home.

He dutifully went to synagogue on the Sabbath, as he had been raised to do. Who knows what his family and the community who had known him since he was born were expecting? The hometown boy made good was back in town so everyone was eager to see and hear him.

In the synagogue Jesus stood up to read; he unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "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." Everyone listening in the synagogue that day would have recognized those words of the Prophet Isaiah immediately; words that were part of the description of the hoped for Messiah.

Jesus rolled up the scroll and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him – this son of Joseph and Mary who suddenly was not the same, not what they expected. They waited and wondered. They were half hopeful and half afraid. What if he *was* the Messiah? Why did he read that particular scripture? Were they even ready for the Messiah? Then he began to say to them, “*Today* this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” I imagine you could have heard a pin drop. *Today*.

It’s through the anointing, leading, and power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus began his public ministry. As Luke’s gospel story continues we will hear that the Holy Spirit strengthened Jesus to endure rejection in his hometown and rejection by the Temple authorities. It was the Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus to cast out demons, to teach and heal, to feed the hungry, and to proclaim the coming of the kingdom. It is through the leading and power of the Holy Spirit that scripture is fulfilled. When we invite the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, *we* are empowered to fulfill the scriptures *today*. Do you get the sense that the Holy Spirit is always acting in new ways and is key to ministry?

Imagine for a moment, Jesus entering Christ and Grace to be with us this morning. Imagine him reading Isaiah’s words telling *us* that “*Today* this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” *Today*. What are our hopes? How do we put our mission into action *today*? What expectations might need to change in our lives, and in our life together for us to continue to offer hope, healing, and hospitality to our neighbors?

Try to let go, for a moment, of all you ever thought you knew about Jesus or about the Church, or about how things are or have always been at Christ and Grace. Then imagine what scripture we could fulfill *today* if we allowed the Holy Spirit to fill us, to lead us, to empower us? What has the Spirit of the Lord anointed us to do, both in our personal lives and as a faith community?

The Vestry held a retreat two weeks ago and we spent time noting what is going well in our ministries, what we could do to strengthen our ministries, and who will be responsible for the new work God is calling us to do. We began to think about the vision God has for us as we move forward in this rapidly changing world. This is not my vision, or the vestry’s vision, but God’s vision - to be embraced by each one of us in this time and this place. It is the Spirit who will reveal the vision and then empower us to fulfill it.

Home can be a wonderful place. Home, if we were blessed to have a good one, is where our memories reside, and they are often recorded in photographs and in the old stories we tell that warm our hearts. It can be a wonderful thing to return home to the escapes of Time and Memory, as Thomas Wolfe puts it, but we cannot remain there. In our own lives we know, on some level, that the old forms and systems of things that once seemed everlasting are changing all the time.

For whatever reason, it seems more difficult to concede this about our faith community. Yes, God is timeless, but the rest of us are not. God’s truth is eternal, yet there are new and changing ways to proclaim the truth. The good news is that Time and Memory have made Christ and Grace a beautiful and nurturing place of hope, healing and hospitality. And now we are being

called to continue the good work from this home, empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the vision God has for our future.

Think about what hope or dream you have for Christ and Grace in the coming year. I hope you will share that with me or any member of our Vestry. I hope you will pray about ways we might fulfill the scriptures, using the gifts each of us have been given by God. It's time, today, to open our hearts to the ways the Holy Spirit would like to anoint us to bring good news to the poor, 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.

Now... once more, imagine Jesus... waiting to hear how we will respond. *Today.* Amen.