



Confirmation St Albans Burnaby May 17 2016

Luke 4:14-21

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

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, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. 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."

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. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

There is a question that rabbis like to ask schoolchildren:

“What’s the most important moment in Jewish history? They ask

The giving of the Torah on Sinai? The children say.

“No,” the rabbis reply.

“The parting of the Red Sea?” the children say.

“No,” the rabbis respond.

“What’s the most important moment in Jewish history?” the rabbis ask again. “Right now!” they say: (Today) is the most important moment in Jewish history.”

The gospel-writer Luke feels the very same way. The word “today” appears 12 times in Luke, compared with only 9 times in the other three gospels combined. It is in Luke that angels, telling the shepherds of Jesus’ birth say, “Today in the town of David a Savior is born to you.” It is in Luke that Jesus, encountering the tax-collector Zacchaeus, tells him, “Come down immediately. I must stay in your house today,” and later, “Today, salvation has come to this house.” It is in Luke that at the crucifixion, Jesus tells the thief hanging next to him: “Today you will be with me in paradise.” And finally in this morning’s text, it is in Luke that Jesus gets up in the synagogue, reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and then pronounces: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Today is the most important time in Jewish history. Today is the most important time for Luke’s Jesus, and, yes, today is the most important time for us.

For some reason learning to focus on living today is one of life’s most elusive lessons. Maybe it’s just part of the human predicament in that we’re uniquely a species that can both remember the past and imagine the future.

Let me be clear. It’s not that it’s bad or wrong for the past or the future to influence who we are and what we do in the present. Memory and hope are cornerstones of human experience and the life of faith. But they can also be bandits, stealing the importance and invitation of the present moment from us. When I think of how much I and others have lost in the present on account of either nostalgia for the past or anxiety or yearning about a future that would never come or would come in its own time, it makes me want to weep. A backward looking perspective or angst about the future can rob us of what is right in front of us, of what is coming up within us now, today.

And so I love that the first word out of Jesus’ mouth in his public debut is “today.” Today the scripture is fulfilled in our hearing.

But Luke’s message is not just about living in and receiving the current moment. Luke’s has a specific content that we’re asked to receive today.

Today the captives have been released
Today the blind have been given their sight
Today the oppressed have been freed,
Today God’s favor has come upon us.

These declarations are both a blessing and a challenge to us. A blessing because they describe what God has already done in the coming of Christ Jesus. God has taken on our flesh and stood in our place when we were captive, blind and oppressed. And a challenge to us in that God is always in need of us to take the thing that God has done and to quicken it, to enact it, to make it more visible in the world.

And this, of course, is especially important tonight as we confirm so many people here at St. Alban's. For we are asking them all to renew their commitment with us today to see the world as a place where God has already acted to free the prisoners; God has already acted to open the eyes of the blind and God has already acted to lift up the oppressed. And we are asking them to rededicate themselves, with us, today to playing their part in making these actions of God visible in the world.

And so tonight, where do you need to claim the release, the new eyes or the freedom you have already been given by God? Where do you need to enter into God's activity of releasing, giving new eyes to or freeing others around you? Likewise, where is this parish in need of some new release, some fresh way of seeing things, some new freedom that God is wanting to give it at this time, a time of transition, a time of change?

Abraham Joshua Heschel once wrote that Judaism does not ask followers to take a leap of faith; it asks them to take a leap of action. This, I believe, is what Jesus is emphasizing in reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and in pronouncing that "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He is inviting us to take a leap of action trusting that God has already acted first. May those taking a leap of action in their confirmation today be blessed and may we are leaping right along with them discover that in God we have all been released, we have all been given new sight and we have all been set free.