



**Third Sunday after the Epiphany: St. Jude's Anglican Care Home**  
**Archbishop Melissa Skelton**  
**Sermon preached, January 23, 2019 at Morning Prayer**

**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 favour."

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."

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Then (Jesus) rolled up the scroll and 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's a story about a question that Jewish rabbis ask children as a way to teach them what's important"

“What’s the most important moment in Jewish history?” the rabbis ask children.

“The giving of the Torah on Sinai?” the children answer.

“No,” say the rabbis.

“The parting of the Red Sea?” the children answer next.

“No,” say the rabbis.

“The most important moment in Jewish history is right now,” they say. “Today is the most important moment in Jewish history.”

Luke, our Gospel writer for today, feels the very same way. The word “today” appears twelve times in Luke, compared with only nine 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 today’s reading, a passage that occurs early on in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, 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, the rabbis say. Today is the most important time for Luke’s Jesus, and, yes, today is the most important time for us.

Why is this?

It’s not because the past is unimportant—for the past gives us our stories, our memories, our sense of identity.

It’s not because the future is unimportant—for the future gives us something to strive for, to look forward to, even if the future is just tomorrow.

But as important as both the past and the future are, they can rob us of the gift of the present moment in our lives, of the today that we have been given. The past can limit us and the future can either distract us or worry us.

And so I love that, after reading the passage from Isaiah in the synagogue, the first word out of Jesus’ mouth in the Gospel of Luke is “today.”

Today the scripture is fulfilled in our hearing:

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.

The way I think about what Jesus is saying here is this: Jesus is trying to shift our focus, redefine who we understand him to be and, out of this, redefine how we think about ourselves. Jesus is trying to redefine what you and I are capable of choosing, are capable of doing today. He is telling us that though we are in prison, we have the capacity to act with the dignity of one who is free, that though we have physical limitations or disabilities, we have the capacity to live and move with the dignity of the able bodied, that though we are held captive by every manner of physical and mental constraint, yet we are capable of choosing paths that support and express our own dignity and the dignity of others.

And how are we capable of doing this? Through Jesus, himself, the Holy One of God, who reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and then pronounces that what he has read has been fulfilled today. For his very presence is a testament to God's own commitment to and presence with us today--the presence of God's powerful dignifying love for us, a love that bestows upon us the capacity to enact that same dignifying love for ourselves and for others.

And so today the Holy One of God is once again among us. Today. Today, the liberating and dignifying love of God has come among us to take us to himself and to remind us again of who we really are. Today. And today the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, our memory and our imagined future, has filled up the present moment with the opportunity to act now as God's own liberating and dignifying love in the world. Today.