

St. Luke's Day
Luke 4:14-21
The Rev. Joel W. Huffstetler
22 October 2017

One of the Psalms that I find most meaningful is Psalm 118, verse 24, "This is the day that the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." This verse is always filled with meaning for me. When I find myself edging toward worry or anxiety, anticipatory anxiety of something that may or may not happen in the future, or when I find myself spending too much time regretting something in the past, wishing I could go back and do it differently knowing I can't: in such times this verse comes to me, very meaningfully, "This is the day that the LORD has made." "This is the day that the LORD has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." Today! This moment.

Regarding our gospel lesson for today, a New Testament scholar named Craig Evans has written, "Of all the passages in Luke's gospel, this one is of critical importance and must be understood well if we are to appreciate the evangelist's theological perspective and major purpose for writing." Of all the passages in the Gospel of Luke, says this New Testament scholar, today's gospel lesson is of critical importance if we're going to understand the overall message that Luke is trying to convey.

We can only imagine what it would have been like to have been in Nazareth on that day early in Jesus' ministry. He's begun his ministry outside of his hometown, he's gathered disciples away from Nazareth. But he comes home, and there comes that day, that moment, when he goes to his own hometown synagogue and has secured permission to be the speaker that day. We can only imagine the expectancy that morning in the congregation, "What will he say?" Matthew and Mark in their accounts of this event tell us the people in the congregation said, 'Isn't this the son of Mary and Joseph? And don't we know his siblings? Where did he get all of this wisdom? What's happened to him?' Luke tells us that Jesus

chose for his scripture that day a piece from Isaiah. We can only imagine Jesus in his hometown synagogue, reading, "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."

This passage in Isaiah is filled with Messianic overtones. That's what's running all the way through this passage in Isaiah, prophecy of the Messiah, the coming of the Kingdom of God. And so Jesus chose this text upon his return to his hometown synagogue, among his own people. And then Luke tells us, "The eyes of all in the synagogue were afixed on him." Imagine that moment, on that day, in that place. Imagine the attention that would've been fixed on Jesus. 'He seems different. What's he going to say?' And then Jesus said, with the eyes of all in the synagogue fixed on him, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Let's just try to feel the impact of that. What it would've been like in the moment on that day. Jesus reads this Messianic prophecy from Isaiah. And then in his hometown church, as it were, says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." It's an extraordinary moment. Think about all who have come before Jesus and his generation and his parents' generation who have longed for the coming of the Messiah. But in that moment, on that day, in that place, Jesus proclaimed, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

As I was preparing this sermon I thought about my junior year high school English teacher, a woman named Blanche Hill. I had better luck with Blanche Hill in class than I did my other English teachers along the way through junior high and high school. Blanche Hill I think understood me better, and understood, 'His lack of performance in class doesn't

necessarily mean a lack of intelligence, it just means he's not interested right now.' I think Blanche Hill understood that about me. To this day when I'm doing research and taking notes, I fill out my notecards exactly the way Blanche Hill taught me to do: author's name in the upper left, subject heading in the upper right, page number directly below the author's name on the far left. I take my notecards exactly like Blanche Hill taught me when I was in the eleventh grade. Something else Blanche Hill taught me was this. She always said, when we were reading something of substance, "Look for the topic sentence." Find the topic sentence, find the sentence where the author tells you where she or he is going, and you'll then be able to understand what they write better if you grasp the topic sentence. What are they trying to say? The topic sentence helps us know that. And what should I be looking for? God bless her, Blanche Hill. Sixteen years old, and I still remember these things she taught me.

Luke 4:21 is the topic sentence of the Gospel of Luke. Jesus reads this Messianic prophecy from Isaiah and then in his hometown synagogue says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." It's the beginning of the Messianic age. The topic sentence of Luke's gospel. "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." A New Testament scholar named R.H. Stein writes about this verse, "Jesus, we learn from Luke, is the bringer, not just the herald, of salvation." That's what we get from Luke 4:21. Jesus is the bringer, not just the herald, of salvation.

I'll close with this. When I was in graduate school at Emory in the mid-eighties, Dr. Fred Craddock was in his prime as one of the great American preachers. Any survey in the last 50 years of great American preachers should have Fred Craddock on it. One of the great preachers of our time. In his commentary on this passage, Fred Craddock says this, "It is interesting that in Luke's gospel, the first public word of Jesus as an adult, apart from

reading scripture, is 'Today.'" The first teaching we hear from Jesus as an adult in Luke other than his reading scripture, the first word that Luke gives us is 'Today.' Dr. Craddock goes on to write about Luke, "Today is never allowed to become yesterday, or to slip again into a vague someday." This is the kind of thing you have to sit back and think about for a while. "Today," says Fred Craddock, in Luke's gospel, "is never allowed to become yesterday, or to slip again into a vague someday." So we're back to where we started. 'This is the day that the LORD has made, let us rejoice and be glad in today.' Today, said Jesus, in this moment, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

There has been an Episcopal Church in this city for 150 years now. Everything we're able to do now is built upon foundation of those who came before us. Everything we're able to do now is built on the foundation of those who came before us. But now it's our time. Today it is our sacred calling to proclaim the love of Jesus Christ. We have what we have in this church from God, through those who came before us. We stand on their shoulders, but now is our time to minister in this changing city and community. Today is the day for us to know Christ and to make him known. Amen.