

Bruton Parish Church
January 31, 2010
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
The Reverend Charles A. Robinson

In the name of and for the glory of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today's Gospel reading begins with the final words of last week's reading –

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

As it sometimes does, the lectionary plays a bit of nonsensical havoc with this story. It is actually one story included with last week's reading.

If you imagine this week's reading in isolation, the natural and immediate question that will occur upon beginning the reading is “what scripture is fulfilled today?”

By way of review and to place everything in context - Jesus has returned to his hometown after having been baptized in a crowd of people, being filled with the Holy Spirit of God, and enduring a wilderness experience. He has started teaching in synagogues throughout Galilee and is developing a bit of a following. People know that he is saying something important. Up until this point in Luke's narrative, we have no idea from the account what Jesus is teaching. He enters his hometown synagogue, is honored with the opportunity of reading and teaching from the scriptures. Having been given the scroll of Isaiah, Jesus chooses to read the Servant's Song –

“...the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because (God) has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. (God) has sent me to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let the broken victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” (Luke 4:18, 19 REB paraphrased).

When Jesus tells them that the scripture is fulfilled in their hearing, Luke makes a statement much different from the other Gospel writers. He writes, “All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious¹ words that came from his mouth. These

¹ [UBS] χάρις, ιτος, f grace, kindness, mercy, goodwill (ἔχω χ. πρὸς have the goodwill of Ac 2.47); a special manifestation of the divine presence, activity, power or glory; a favor, expression of kindness, gift, blessing (κατὰ χ. as a gift Ro 4.4, 16; ἵνα δευτέραν χ. σχήτε in order that you might be blessed twice 2 Cor 1.15); thanks, gratitude; graciousness (ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν πάντοτε ἐν χ. your speech should always be pleasant Col 4.6)

[Fri] χάρις, ιτος, ἡ grace; (1) as a quality that adds delight or pleasure *graciousness, attractiveness, charm* (LU 4.22); (2) as a favorable attitude; (a) active, of what is felt toward another *goodwill, favor* (AC 2.47); (b) as a religious technical term for God's attitude toward human beings *kindness, grace, favor, helpfulness* (JN 1.16, 17; EP 2.8); (3) concretely; (a) of exceptional effects produced by God's favor *ability, power, enabling* (RO 12.6; 1C 15.10); (b) of

words were seen as grace-filled, kind, and merciful. Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke paints a picture of people, who initially, at least, were enamored with Jesus and what he taught. They began to ask the questions – “Isn’t this Joseph’s son – that kid from the carpenter’s shop.” They began to imagine that he was attributing to himself the servant’s mantle among them. He was apparently saying a popular thing.

However, Luke tells us that Jesus shifts considerably and immediately things take a turn that much more resembles the other Gospel writers.

He tells them that he knows that they will expect him to do spectacular things in their midst, such as they have heard spread throughout Capernaum.

It is reasonable to imagine that Jesus returns to his hometown following his baptism, his wilderness experience and establishment of a following to reconnect with the familiar on his journey to understand all of what is happening to him and around him.

So here in today’s Gospel Jesus is sitting, every eye focused upon him. As the account unfolds, Jesus finds that for which he came home, realizing his role as prophet, he begins to see the larger purpose of all that has begun to happen, not just that which will be required of him, but that which will be required of all of those who follow him.

The message that the prophet brought to the people emerging from Babylon is the message that he brings.

He tells them that the words are fulfilled. It is an excitement and amazement to them but one can imagine that it is a revelation to him.

Unlike Mark and Matthew, Luke does not present us a Jesus in the midst of an incredulous and offended people whose unbelief stifles his work amongst them. This seeking Jesus finds just what he seeks – a definition of his vocation and an acceptance of it among the people who know him the best.

Luke portrays a Jesus, however, who suddenly understands that the vocation he has uncovered cannot be lived out in a place of reassurance, his place of anchor.

practical proofs of goodwill from one person to another *kind deed, benefit, favor* (AC 24.27; 2C 1.15); *collection* for the poor, *generous gift* (1C 16.3); (4) as an experience or state resulting from God’s favor *state of grace, favored position* (RO 5.2); (5) as a verbal thank offering to God *gratitude, thanks* (1C 15.57; 2C 9.15); (6) as contained in formulas that express greetings or farewell in letters *goodwill, favor, blessing* (RO 1.7; 16.20)

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He tells the legendary stories of Elijah and Elisha, and through them, he demonstrates that this Gospel of liberation for the afflicted and the imprisoned, for the victimized and the impoverished cannot be bound to a favored place of comfort and acceptance.

He does not limit what he will do within his hometown; he precludes doing anything at all.

This is a radical message that requires the overturning of convention, the forfeiture of home, and even the facing of death. Luke sets for us here a pattern of the conflict ahead, the clash between the purposes of God and the powers that stand against God. The actions Jesus will take and the actions he will instigate through his followers will result in recognition, awe, suspicion, and rejection throughout the rest of Luke's narrative.

As Jesus awakens to his purpose and vocation, he realizes the harsh reality that his home, his rootedness is lost to him. That precious part of his identity tied to his hometown, to his native land is relinquished. The refuge of nativity is gone. Luke's odd description of the people's attempt to cast him off the cliff signals the end of this formative place for Jesus. In Luke's gospel, Jesus becomes "a stranger" and in a very real way remains such until the Emmaus travelers recognize him in the breaking of the bread at the end of the Gospel account. (Luke 24).

He passes through the danger and in another portion of the narrative that has been excluded by the lectionary; Jesus is found teaching back in Capernaum, distant from Nazareth. They, too, are astounded at his authoritative teaching.

When Jesus says to his family and friends in Nazareth, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing, they first imagine that he has come to bear to them many gifts of grace and mercy. When they learn that he has no such intention, they turn upon him.

What he offers them instead of a fulfillment at his hands, is a fulfillment within their own hands.

Jesus truly realizes his role as prophet in the words of Isaiah, but he sees a larger role for those he is teaching. It is not only Jesus who is to fulfill the words of Isaiah. It is not only Jesus on whom the Lord rests. It is not only Jesus who is anointed to bring good news, to proclaim release, recovery of sight, freedom from oppression, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. It is every Nazarene, every person from Capernaum, every Galilean, every person who will hear the teaching and who will fulfill it in their own life in the name of Christ - every disciple, every Christian, every Episcopalian, every member of the community of Bruton Parish.

Later, on the road to Jerusalem a man comes to Jesus and says, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus answers, “Foxes have their holes and birds their roosts; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” (Luke 9:58 REB paraphrased).

We have promised in our baptismal covenant to extend beyond our homeland borders and comfort zones to take on the same challenge that Jesus read in Isaiah. In covenant, we say we will “... proclaim the good news of God in Christ by word and example...we will seek and serve Christ in all persons... we will strive for justice and peace among all and respect the dignity of every human being. That proclamation, that seeking and serving, that striving is how we continue in the apostle’s teaching and the breaking of the bread.

And the breaking of the bread is where we recognize the Christ that is the Christ in us.

The words of Jesus span the millennia and tell us that, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

Blessed be the name of God.