

Sermon February 2, 2025

Children's Time – god comes in The most unexpected ways

Luke 4:14-21

Then 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.’

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, ‘Is not this Joseph's son?’ He said to them, ‘Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, “Doctor, cure yourself!” And you will say, “Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.”’ And he said, ‘Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six

months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.'

When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

The Spirit Comes

Today we hear of the beginning of Jesus' ministry and we hear what he has to say about God's plan for humanity. He opens the scroll to the week's reading. In a powerful voice he read Isaiah's words of hope and promise:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because she has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
She 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.

With all eyes on him, the congregation waited to see what he would say next – what would be his interpretation of these ancient words, a Messianic promise for them. Would he address the occupation, the oppression of the empire, or perhaps his own ministry that is gaining attention throughout the region? No one breathed, the community alert with expectation. What would Jesus, their neighbor, say?

Jesus could have appealed to their nostalgia--*How great Isaiah was in the good ole days*--or their fragile I hope for a better future. *The kingdom of God will come! Don't give up!* But that's not what he did. He did the one thing no one expected!

"**Today** this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

"*Today* this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Not the good ole days, not the promised future. Today. Right now. Bursting forth in front of us.

The people looked around and wondered how he could say such a thing. Doesn't he know how horrible things are? That there is more inequality than ever, more injustice, more violence and terrorism than our ancestors ever knew? That they were all firmly under the control of a tyrant who was constantly looking for more power.

They were so busy looking behind them or dreaming of a rosy future that they cannot see that God is present right before their eyes.

"Today" is the most radical thing Jesus ever said! "Look around. See the Spirit of God at work, right here. Right now. God is *with us*. Just as God promised our Moses at the burning bush, 'I will be with you.' This is the sign of God's covenant. The ever active, ever loving, ever liberating, always present God is here with us. Now."

From the very beginning, Jesus tells us exactly what God's plan for the people are: A plan that is inclusive for all people. A plan that reaches beyond the borders of the Promised Land and reaches out to those who have been left behind.

Jesus stood before his hometown and preached good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed, and, the goes on to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. The Year of the Lord's Favor is also called the Jubilee year, which is mandated in Leviticus and calls for economic justice found in radical debt forgiveness. No wonder some of them sound his words so threatening.

And no wonder so many found them so hopeful.

The radical nature of Jesus' ministry has always made people take sides. The people who heard him that day were shocked, maybe frightened, by his words... and they responded in rage. They chased him out of town and tried to silence him, but the Spirit's voice was louder than their rage.

Something remarkable happens that day, in the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The crowd rises up and tries to chase him away... they don't want to hear his radical words. They chase him to the edge of a cliff, but even that can't stop him. We are only told that Jesus moved through that angry crowd and continued to spread the Good News of God's Love. Jesus was able to look those angry people in the eyes and walk right past them, because the Spirit of God was with him. Jesus was never really in danger, because the Spirit of God was with him. Jesus was able to face down this hostile crowd because the Spirit of God was with him.

And covered by the Spirit of God, Jesus walked through that crowd and shook the dust off his feet.

Hear the Good News, Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The Spirit of God is with us too! Here in this place and when we take the good news with us outside these doors.

When we stand up for justice and say things our neighbors don't want to hear, the Spirit is with us!

When we reach out to lift up the poorest in our community... or go into the communities where they live, the Spirit is with us!

When we reach out and touch those who are sick or dying, the Spirit is with us!

When we face down those who bully the weak and the marginalized, the Spirit is with us!

When we stand up in love when those around us are moved only by fear and hatred, the Spirit is with us!

Whenever you go into the darkest places in our world, whether they are in your own hometown or in faraway lands, The Spirit is with us!

The Spirit covered Jesus with faith, hope and love that day, as he walked though the crowd, and the *Spirit will cover you too... and you... and you!*

No matter where we go, no matter what we do... the Spirit will cover us all!

This doesn't necessarily mean that we will always walk into safety. The Spirit stayed with Jesus as he suffered on the cross and stayed with the disciples in those dark days of denial and betrayal. But, no matter what we face... no matter what life's journey has in store for us, we can be assured that we are not alone. The Spirit of God, the Breath of God given to us in fire and wind, will never let us face life's dangers alone.

So go out today... go out to a world filled with pain and need- and live into Jesus' proclamation of hope. Go out because God needs us TODAY."

Go out and remember... The Spirit is with you and will cover you in love... today... always and forever. Amen