

Today is the Third Sunday after the Epiphany, and on this day we continue our Epiphany theme of Jesus as the manifestation of God-with-us, Jesus as *epiphanizing* God in his ministry and mission. Our Gospel story today tells how Jesus revealed God's presence the first time he preached at the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth.

Now for Luke this is a very important moment, a pivotal moment, in Jesus' mission. Jesus is just beginning his public ministry. He has been baptized by John, and anointed with the Holy Spirit; he's been forty days in the wilderness, fasting and praying and getting focused on his messianic calling. And now he's come back into Galilee, filled with the power of the Spirit, to begin preaching and teaching and making the reign of God known among the people. Luke sets the scene very carefully: he says that Jesus is teaching in the synagogues, that he is praised by everyone, that a report about him is spreading through all the countryside—but Luke doesn't tell us the *content* of Jesus' teaching until we get to this scene in Nazareth. And here, in his home synagogue, Jesus is invited to preach; and he takes the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and he finds the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, and liberation to the oppressed, and to say that now is the time of the Lord's favor." And he rolls up the scroll, and sits down to preach, and every eye is on him, and everybody is waiting to hear what he's going to say. And he says to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. Today, the promise God gave you through Isaiah is beginning to come true."

As Luke presents it, this one-sentence sermon is the key to understanding the whole public ministry of Jesus. In his choice of this scripture from Isaiah, and in his claim to be the fulfillment of it, Jesus is announcing, Jesus is giving a programmatic preview, of what his mission is going to be all about. From this point on, everything Jesus does in his public ministry will be, in one way or another, a fulfillment of this sermon at Nazareth.

In the first place, Jesus connects his ministry to what has gone before. By quoting from Isaiah, and by claiming the prophetic promise as his own, Jesus is showing that his ministry stands in continuity with the faithful people's experience of God throughout the long centuries of their history. Jesus is promising that what he will be doing, in teaching and preaching, in healing and exorcising, in gathering faithful believers around himself, will be a continuation of the mighty acts that God showed forth in Abraham, in Moses, in David, in Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and in all the faithful who have followed God. Jesus is here showing that his ministry is deeply rooted in the faithful past.

But Jesus is also claiming that his ministry will be more than just a continuation of God's mighty works from the past. Jesus does not say, "Today this scripture is *continued* in your hearing"; he says "Today this scripture is *fulfilled* in your hearing." Jesus' ministry brings something new to God's promise: it brings a new immediacy, a new vitality, a new embodied, lived experience of God's presence and God's power and God's love. Jesus' ministry is rooted in the past; but it opens up into a new future with God.

And Luke shows Jesus fulfilling this sermon in everything he does. Jesus says he will proclaim recovery of sight to the blind—both the physically blind, like Bartimaeus, whom Jesus will meet on the road outside of Jericho; and the inwardly blind, like the scribes and the Pharisees whom Jesus will challenge to see God, and their neighbors, and themselves, in a new light. Jesus says he will bring good news to the poor—both the materially poor, like those who will gather in the wilderness to hear him preach, and have no money to buy food at the end of the day, so that Jesus will multiply loaves and fishes to feed them; and the inwardly poor, like Zacchaeus, the rich tax collector who is yet so empty inside, so poor in his heart, that he will climb up a sycamore tree (a very socially embarrassing thing for a rich tax collector to do) just to see Jesus, just so Jesus can fill his heart with the riches of God's grace. Jesus says he will proclaim liberation to the oppressed—and

time after time in his ministry he will set people free from possession by the devil, and set people free from being attacked by disease, and set people free from the bondage of their own hard-heartedness and sin and lack of compassion. Jesus says he will proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, the time of the coming of God's grace—and he will show forth that grace, in his life, in his death, in his resurrection, in his sending of the Holy Spirit to enlighten and empower all. Everything Jesus does in the whole of his public ministry flows from this announcement of his mission, this statement of his purpose, in his sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth.

And of course the mission Jesus began in the synagogue at Nazareth didn't stop there. The ministry Jesus lived is also the ministry to which he called his disciples; the mission Jesus embodied is also the mission he passed on to his Body the Church. Jesus' mission statement in the Gospel today is our mission statement as the church today, too.

Now we at Trinity have a mission statement, a statement of purpose as a congregation in Christ. That statement was used prominently in the parish profile of the search process that brought me here. That statement is emblazoned on the top of our parish webpage, so that everyone who checks us out, from the immediate community or from the whole wide world, knows what we say we are about. That statement says this about us: "The purpose of Trinity Church is to welcome and encourage all in our journey with Christ; to provide a loving, active environment for Christian worship, learning, and service; to utilize our Episcopalian heritage and our unique gifts, resources, and blessings as a witness in the community."

And you can see how our purpose statement at Trinity is rooted and grounded in Jesus' statement of his mission in the Gospel. Jesus connected his ministry to the faithful past. And our purpose statement speaks of utilizing our Episcopal heritage, like the Prayer Book and the Hymnal, and resources like this beautiful church building and a history of prominence in service to our community, that we've inherited from our faithful past. And Jesus said that his ministry would be something new, something that would open up into future possibilities. And our purpose statement speaks of providing an active environment for worship, learning, and service—and worship, learning, and service are always *new*, always opening up to the future, because even when we pray traditional prayers or study traditional texts, we pray them and study them in *this* moment and *this* situation, in our unique contemporary reality, so that in worship and learning and service God is always taking up what is old and recreating it as something transformingly new.

And, most importantly, in our purpose statement we say that we will welcome and encourage everyone in our journey with Christ—and that is the journey Jesus describes as a journey of Spirit, and of vision, and of good news for the poor, and of liberation for all, and of the time of God's favor. And we at Trinity are on that journey, we summon and support each other to go farther on that journey with every step we take. We share a vision of God's glory in the ministry of beauty we offer in our windows and in our music. We share good news for the poor as we feed the hungry, and support shelter for the homeless, and travel to Honduras, and create partnerships in Haiti. We share release from captivity as we work to bring healing to those who are ill, and comfort to those who are hurting, and recovery to those who are addicted, and purpose to those who feel lost, and new beginnings to those who know the brokenness of their own sin. We share in the time of God's favor, the moment of grace, when in sacrament in service we see Christ in one another and know the Spirit is empowering us to do more—to *be* more—than we could ever be on our own. We share these things, we strive for these things, as we welcome and encourage each other in our journey with Christ, the mission Jesus gives us in the Gospel.

Jesus preached in the synagogue at Nazareth and said "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Let us pray at Trinity today that, by the grace of God and through the love of Jesus and in the power of the Spirit, that scripture may be fulfilled in us, too. Amen.