

Luke 4:21-30

²¹Then [Jesus] began to say to [all in the synagogue in Nazareth,] “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”

²³He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” ²⁴And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.

²⁵But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.

²⁷There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

²⁸When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹They 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. ³⁰But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Luke 4:21-32, 2015

This week our gospel lesson is the continuation of last week's story about Jesus returning to his hometown and going to synagogue as he always would.

You remember he was handed the scroll to read from and read a passage from Isaiah.

¹⁸"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,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

At the end everyone waited with anticipation for him to speak. When he did he said,

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

When those gathered there with Jesus heard this they heard good news.

The Prophet Isaiah's words were fulfilled--the messiah has come. They had something to celebrate,

and as the story continues today, we hear that they do, in a way.

²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”

I asked you a couple of questions last week, which you answered. The first one was.

How do you hear the good news, the words of release, recovery and freedom in Jesus’ message?

Is this good news for you?

Thank you for your responses.

As I read them over several times this week it became more clear how you heard the gospel lesson,

and how you saw yourselves in Jesus’ message.

The point that became the focus of our pastor’s text study this week was the possibility that we do not hear the gospel but overhear it.

Have Terri interrupt with a question about my sabbatical.

Have the conversation with her.

This conversation that Terri and I had you were not a part of.

You overheard it.

It isn’t that it was not relevant to your life here at All Saints. There was some information shared that was at least

a point of interest to you, but you overheard the conversation Terri and I were having,

you were not engaged in the conversation yourself.

I get the sense that to one extent or another many of you kind of overhear the good news yourself.

Here is why I say so. You said so in your responses to the first question I asked last week,

And that is not a bad thing.

You remember the question was,

How do you hear the good news, the words of release, recovery and freedom in Jesus' message?

Your responses showed me two ways in which you hear the good news.

First, many of you hear the good news through others. Your hearing comes through your connection with the lives of those who are suffering and in need.

You hear the good news as you give care, share wealth, mentor, listen, teach, pray and feed,

all for the sake of others.

You know you may not change the world, but you can change the world for the few people God places in front of you.

You understand that when God opens your heart to the needs of others God also empowers you to go and do,

and will be there in the middle of it all.

It is on the faces of the poor, the captive, blind and oppressed that some of you see the face of God,

experience His presence, the Good News for yourself,

experience release for the captive,

sight for the blind

and freedom for the oppressed parts of yourself.

Others of you hear the good news more directly.

You hear it in the scriptures, in prayer, generous giving, in the voice that speaks to your mind and heart. You are inspired by the gospel.

Worship is important. Singing the songs, reciting the creed, praying the prayers together is important to building faith that lasts, that is strong,

that shapes who you are and guides your actions.

For all of you it is the heart that is touched by the Good News, but touched in different ways.

If we take a look at the rest of what Jesus says to the congregation at the synagogue in today's gospel reading, the point that you perhaps overhear the good news becomes more clear.

This is the first time I remember reading this passage and thinking,

Things are going along fine and then Jesus just makes them mad, and they want to kill him right then and there in his hometown.

But, what he has to say, while it did make them mad, was the prophetic message they needed to hear.

He is saying to them that they will not be a part of this mission to:

bring good news to the poor.

proclaim release to the captives

and restore sight to the blind,

freed to the oppressed

or to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Going back to the days of Isaiah, and earlier that is how they saw their role in the world, but Jesus says no,

and this has happened before.

In the time of Elijah and Elishah God uses the widow at Zarephath in Sidon, and a Syrian general to accomplish His purposes.

The widow does what Elijah says and she and her son, and Elijah all have food to eat through the famine.

Elijah was saved from starvation during the three years that followed.

There is the story of Naaman a Syrian who was the general of the army of the king of Aram. He was a leper.

Elisha healed him and later Naaman helped Israel against the king who he served, when Aram went to war with them.

There were plenty of widows and lepers in Israel God could have used, but He used people from outside Israel to accomplish His purposes.

Jesus points that out and the people in the Synagogue are infuriated!

All the while through this entire story we are overhearing a conversation between Jesus and those people that somehow proclaims the good news to us.

So, is it possible for Jesus' message to have the same affect on us as it did on them?

We certainly don't have the same reaction.

The people in the synagogue are ready to kill Jesus, yet our responses are quite tempered.

In fact we are not offended at all by them.

We have the opportunity to reflect of Jesus' words in the same way you might think about the conversation Terri and I had.

You can hold it at arms length and be more objective. That gives you the opportunity to see how you fit into the story, and you do.

You told me so.

The second question I asked last week was:

In light of this passage, in light of the reality of your life,

how are you poor, what holds you captive, what are you blind to, and what oppresses you?

I appreciate so deeply the responses you offered.

So many of them were heartfelt expressions of your suffering, your shortcomings, fears, struggles, frailty, guilt, shame, loneliness, selfishness, lack of compassion and love;

It was like reading confessions, and I say that with every bit of respect and dignity confession deserves.

And yet I heard the most heartfelt expressions of trust, faith, and gratitude for God's love, grace, blessings and all God has provided you in this life.

Thank you for your openness and trusting me enough to share your life with me.

The Good News of our gospel lesson is really heard in Jesus' words from last week,

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

or perhaps in your overhearing.

The good news is proclaimed, captives are released, the blind see, and the oppressed are freed.

However you see yourself, what ever your life is like there is good news in this message.

Jesus is on a mission for your life. He has come for you and will not leave you alone until He has your heart, all that you are and all you have.

He gives His life for you that you may be free for life with Him.

Amen