

**“Fulfilled”**

Luke 4:14- 21

21 January 2007, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany C  
the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor  
Zion West Walworth United Methodist

**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.’

Prayer.

I have discovered that  
the older I get  
the more desire I have  
to return to  
the places of my youth.  
Those who have never  
moved far from home  
might find this hard to understand.  
Those of us  
who lived a semi- nomadic  
life might know what I mean.

Last fall  
I spent considerable time  
in and around  
the city of Jamestown,

where I lived the first  
seven years of my life.  
I drove past my first house;  
saw the same concrete front steps  
that are in many family pictures.  
It was a house my dad and uncle  
built piece by piece,  
where I helped carry bricks  
up the ladder  
to my father  
so he could finish  
laying up the chimney.  
I drove past the parking lot  
where my first school was located,  
and passed by my second school,  
now converted to senior apartments.

Many locations

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have remained unvisited  
and exist in my memory  
unchanged since the day I left:  
The parsonage in Addison,  
the Pinnacle Golf course on the hill;  
the church in Little Valley,  
where I was confirmed into  
membership;  
The high school in Waverly,  
the nursing home behind  
the school  
where my two buddies and I,  
pot washers in all our glory,  
ruled the evening kitchen;  
each location has remained  
unvisited in my adulthood.

It is one thing to visit;  
it is quite another  
to look an old friend in the eye,  
shake their hand,  
and sit down to catch up on life;  
especially if you haven't seen them  
in thirty years.  
People like  
Tommy Jordan and Ernie Langford,  
Kevin and Keith Andrews,  
Scott Prescott and Wade Lucas,  
Chuck Fiske and Rusty Stroman,  
old playground sweethearts  
like Kimberly McDonnald and Ceila  
Bauman,  
all childhood friends,  
all ghosts in my memory  
becoming more thin  
and invisible to me with each passing  
day.

Growing desire  
is met half- way  
with the fear of rejection.  
“They are all probably  
doctors and lawyers now.”  
“They'd look at me and ask

'why haven't you done something  
with your life?'"  
I think to myself.  
Or  
“What's the matter with you?  
Can't you keep a job?  
Can't you stop moving  
from church to church?”  
or  
“You? a minister? Yea, right!”  
I'm not certain I could bear  
the weight.

The thought of being invited  
to the Little Valley church  
would be both  
exciting and frightening.  
People who knew me as  
an eighth grader,  
hell- raising preacher's kid,  
would be seated  
in the pews with  
their arms crossed  
and scowls on their faces.  
I can see myself,  
in my mind's eye,  
standing it its pulpit  
addressing the congregation,  
all- the- while  
sweat would be dripping  
out of my every pore  
drenching my face  
which I would mop  
with a saturated handkerchief.  
It would not be a pretty sight.

Today we find Jesus  
returning to the synagogue of his  
childhood  
to read from the prophet Isaiah  
and to teach  
those he had known as a child.  
That, my friends,  
takes courage.

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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.'*

It is the Spirit of the Lord  
that gives Jesus the courage,  
that gives him the vision  
and the means to make  
his call to ministry happen.  
He was anointed by the same spirit,  
the same way a new king  
would be anointed to take the throne,  
by being born of a virgin  
baptized by water and the Spirit  
in Jordan's icy waters,  
sealed with the words,  
"This is my Son, the Beloved,  
with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus had been anointed for a purpose;  
to bring good news to the poor.  
What is the best possible news  
to someone who is poor?  
Your poverty is ended!  
No more bare cupboards!  
No more unemployment;  
bouncing from crappy job  
to crappy job!  
No more bill collectors!  
No more bankers, debt,  
or high interest loans!  
Good news to the poor  
is restoration,  
not only of money and livelihood,  
but also inclusion back into society  
and with that  
a return of the self-esteem.

Jesus had been anointed for a purpose;  
to proclaim release to the captives.  
This is not a get out of jail free card  
to true offenders.  
Captives at the time of Jesus  
were those in prison  
who couldn't pay their taxes,  
terribly inflated taxes,  
to support the Emperor's foreign  
legions.  
Those in prison  
included protesters, intellectuals,  
students, free-thinkers;  
anyone who the government  
deemed undesirable were  
penciled to the black list.  
Captives in a system  
with ancient jurisprudence  
were considered guilty before being  
tried  
were delayed due process  
and were denied appeal.  
Get thrown in prison  
and it was the end of the line.

Jesus had been anointed for a purpose;  
for the recovery of sight to the blind.  
Yes, Jesus worked miracles,  
spitting on some dirt  
and spreading the mud on eyes,  
to give sight to the blind.  
For those individuals,  
sight was as good as salvation-  
from a life of begging,  
being considered unclean,  
and from exclusion in the community.  
Each miracle served to point to  
a larger truth  
related to the loving benevolence  
of a just God.  
But blindness also includes  
those who can not see the truth,  
who can not see  
where God is leading them.

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Blindness is a metaphor  
for Biblical literalist,  
who fail to recognize  
and understand its deeper  
and rich themes.  
As the living Word,  
Jesus comes to reveal  
the Word,  
to a world  
longing for its every meaning.

Jesus had been anointed for a purpose;  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor!  
Once every 50,  
according to Jewish wisdom,  
the Jubilee was to be celebrated,  
forgiving all debt, and releasing all  
mortgages,  
as a means to remember  
the Lord's benevolent gift  
of a promised land  
to wandering, chosen Hebrews  
(see Leviticus 25:1).

Jesus had been anointed for a purpose.  
The elimination of poverty was his first  
priority.  
The establishment of justice was his  
charge.  
Jesus came to give insight and  
direction,  
through his written and spoken Word,  
to a world aimlessly lost.  
Any personal anxiety he may have had  
returning and speaking to his  
hometown crowd,  
pales in comparison to the fact that  
Jesus meant to change the world,  
and doing so, would expose him  
to far greater risks,  
including his own death  
like a common criminal.

The grave just could not hold him.

Where is Rome today?  
And I believe it is fitting,  
to ask the question  
on the Sunday preceding  
our annual church conference,  
"Where is Jesus today?"  
Are his priorities  
our priorities?  
How are we doing when it comes  
to eliminating poverty?  
Do we work  
for peace and justice,  
right here in West Walworth  
and over there,  
on the other side of the planet?  
What are we doing  
to bring sight to the blind?  
Are we sharing the Word,  
interpreting the Word,  
and following the Word,  
in everything we think, say, and do?

"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.'  
(Luke 4:20- 21)  
Amen.

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