

Luke 4:14-21

14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. 15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

16 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, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

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,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
20 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. 21 Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

I wonder how many of you can remember when you were just starting out on your career? Can you remember those first few hours or days when you had finished your schooling or training and, fresh eyed, you engaged with your co-workers or clients whatever group you worked with?

The reading from Luke’s Gospel is a snapshot of the first few days or perhaps weeks of Jesus’ ministry and it takes place in a synagogue in Nazareth, his hometown. We know so little about Jesus’ personal life, so we can only conjecture that, Jesus felt like most of us did when we started our career.

Today’s gospel reading has Jesus in the synagogue reading a lesson from the ancient Hebrew Scriptures

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Then he follows with the bold statement that what is written in that passage from Isaiah was fulfilled ‘today’. The congregation responds with wonder and respect
I wonder if those gathered in the synagogue were really listening.

It was High Noon in Burnaby, and the streets were, as usual, buzzing with crowds, cars, taxis, horns blowing, brakes screeching, sirens wailing. Two men were making their way together through the crowd. One was a native Vancouverite, and the other a visiting farmer from Saskatchewan. Suddenly the farmer stopped in his tracks. "Hold on," he said, "I hear a cricket." His friend replied, "Are you kidding? Even if there were a cricket around here, which isn't likely, you would never be able to hear it over all this noise."

The farmer remained quiet for a few moments, and then walked several paces to the corner where a bush was growing in a large cement planter. He turned several leaves over and found the cricket. The city man was flabbergasted. "What great ears you have," he said. "No," the farmer replied, "it is a matter of what you have been conditioned to listen for. Look, I will show you." With that, he pulled a handful of coins from his pocket and let them drop to the sidewalk. As if on signal, every head on the block turned. "You see," said the farmer, "you hear what you want to hear. It is a matter of what you are listening for."

It is as if Luke is insisting that we, the church of St. Stephen the Martyr be fully present, not missing a single nuance of this moment, not just hearing what we want to hear.

Why? Because Jesus' decision to choose this passage from the prophet Isaiah indicates, how he sees his role at this starting point of his public ministry. He sees himself as *liberator*. It may be that no single word can describe our Lord's ministry, but at this moment, as he stands in the synagogue in Nazareth, there is no doubt about the way in which he sees his role. We hear it in the quiet deliberation of his words: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus as liberator. God become a human in order to liberate the poor, liberate the captives, and liberate the blind. God reaching out sometimes to those who are physically poor, captive, blind, lonely, isolated and so on. At another time, Jesus will speak of those who are poor in spirit. Jesus will heal those who are physically blind while also condemning those who are spiritually and morally blind. At all levels, our Lord comes to us as liberator. We need to ask what this means for his faithful people in the world of our own time.

When I started thinking about this morning's reading from Luke and about the liberation, which our faith brings to us, I thought also about the children and grandchildren and their parents or grandparents, who are part of our faith-community. These past few months, and especially today, for this baptism of Wyatt, we have a number of children and youth participating in worship services and in the Children and Youth Ministry, representing several different families. If we were to give each parent or grandparent of these children the opportunity to share with us in church what they would wish for their children, I wonder what they would say. In the Gospel, Jesus is saying aloud to his community what he wishes for them. And, he

says it very powerfully. He wishes liberation from those things which keep us from being healthy, from being free, from being whole.

The one word I came up with in my own mind – the one word which expresses my wish for the children in our faith-community, is ‘integrity. Integrity meaning wholeness. That you are a whole person. You say what you mean and you mean what you say, and you live your life according to values. We say that ‘he or she has integrity; you cannot buy them off.’ The children and youth in our faith-community will be amongst those running the world in 20 or 30 years. And integrity is most likely to be, probably, the last boundary as to whether we survive or not, literally.

I thought, therefore, that we have to give them better role models and teach them the value of integrity. God knows, our world is full of examples of people who exhibit the opposite of integrity. Just glancing through the newspaper this past week gives up these examples: “Multi-Billion dollar charges for B.C. man alleged to have fraudulently squandered the money of his clients”; “Missing and murdered First Nations men as well as women should be the subject of a national enquiry”; “U.S. TV channel named GUNS created to buy and sell fire arms”; “bombed out block both home and school to Syrian children”; “Dad guilty of murdering his daughter’s boyfriend”. All these and I did not look at potential headlines in the business section, otherwise there would be many more examples.

Of course, you could say, “that is the government” and “television is the cause of it all” and “the business world is the survival of the fittest”. But, someday some of the children and youth in our Children and Youth Ministry will be a politician, a mother or father, or an aspiring computer programmer on the board of a corporation or community agency. And, whether they have integrity or not, means whether the world, literally, survives or not.

And so we need to pray for them, that they will have integrity and better models than perhaps our generation has given them (or at least the ones that the media glorifies). If the media have glorified such amoral models for our children, perhaps we as a faith community, and particularly parents, must offer them a different model.

Among the values that we hold and want to give to our children and youth is that all people are the children of God and are accepted by God. Not just ‘some’ people, but all people. Our society, including our churches have been guilty of denying liberation to so many groups and individuals. The Jews, the Syrians who are persecuted by ISIL, First Nations people, The Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans-sexual, Queer (LGBTQ) communities, the poor and homeless, those who suffer from addiction and mental illness, and so on. They are persecuted because they are different.

This past week, for example, some leaders of the world’s Anglican Churches, contrary to the spirit of this morning’s gospel reading, condemned the lives of those who are Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, trans-sexual and Queer (also known as LGBTQ)

community. The Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, Archbishop Fred Hiltz offered this reflection after that meeting:

"I apologize for the manner in which the Church has often regarded the LGBTQ community and condemned their lives with very harsh language. I call on our Church to re-affirm its commitment to rejecting anywhere in the world criminal sanctions against lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer or questioning people. I call on our Church to renew its resolve in listening to the voices and the stories of its LGBTQ members as we wrestle through conversations regarding the pastoral care we are called to provide for all people. I ask the prayers of the whole Church for the LGBTQ people in the midst of the hurt they are bearing and the hope to which they cling for the recognition and sacramental blessing of their relationships."

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me", says Jesus, "to bring good news...to proclaim release." It is only those with moral integrity, like those who genuinely follow Jesus, who literally will save this planet. Will our children be among them?

We are teaching our children the gospel. "The one who would rule," Jesus says, "must be the servant of all." That gospel challenges our power-hungry society, that measures success only, and exclusively, in terms of money. The gospel challenges that, and says there is another way to act, to live, and to serve so that we might bring good news, heal and liberate people.

Therefore, we have to help our children, our young people, find God. Even if they lapse, and even if they enter into a period when they turn their backs on God, we know, if you build that in early, those who lose God re-discover God in another way.

So, talk to your children, your nephews, nieces and grandchildren. Model to them. Show them what you do, and how you do it, and how faith enters in. and help them once more to know, not only God, but someday to rediscover so powerfully that they, our children, the members of our faith - community of St. Stephen the Martyr, will make a difference.

Let us continue to teach them the words of Jesus who is quoting the prophet Isaiah:

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to bring good news to the poor.
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-The Reverend Gary Hamblin