

Year C
 4 Epiphany
 Jan. 31, 2010

Jeremiah 1:4-10
 Ps 71:1-6
 1Corinth 13:1-13
 Luke 4:21-30

I've got to tell you.... when I'm scheduled to preach, I usually read the lessons 3 weeks or so in advance, so they can sit in me and percolate a little

- Which means that last week, as I heard Mary read the gospel, and Steve preach, I knew that the passage we just heard was on deck for this week
- And I sat over there in the choir, squirming just a little
- Wanting to say *yeah.....but.....*

Yeah, Jesus is the small town boy made good who has come home to greet his friends and neighbors

- And yeah, he makes a major pronouncement about God's word while he's there
- And the friends and neighbors are impressed
- But then why.....why... does he do his level best to really, really annoy them? To the point that they want to kill him?

I get annoyed myself that the international committee of experts who put together the lectionary split this gospel passage over two weeks

- Clearly it is about one event – and I like to take that event whole and not piecemeal

To recap the first part of the passage we heard last week:

- Jesus has returned to his home town Nazareth, where he grew up, and he goes to the synagogue, takes the scroll, opens it open...
- and Jesus reads from the great prophet Isaiah:

*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 closes the scroll..... hands it back to the attendant....sits down
- (Luke should have been a film director -- he sets this up very dramatically -- we're on the edge of our seats along with the people there in that synagogue)
- and then he says : *Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*
- And every one goes *ooooohhhhhhhhhh -- for a local kid he's awesome...and what a thing to say!!! Good news!*

Now we have to remember that Jesus' friends and neighbors were all good Jews

- They'd heard the scriptures read week by week -- all about how they are God's chosen people
- But life has not felt very chosen for a long time
- Right now they are living under the domination of the Romans, who are in their land as an occupying army
- Before that it was the Greeks....and before them the Assyrians.....and before them the Babylonians who carted all the leaders off to Babylon for about 70 years
- Before that the northern kingdom and southern kingdom were duking it out between them for power
- Life has not felt chosen in a long, long time

So when they hear that God's word is fulfilled, it seems natural that they are thinking *At last -- our time has come! our friends in prison are going to go free -- we're going to have stuff at last -- peace, prosperity. We can sit under our own fig tree just as the*

prophets said, and have peace in the shade. Hallelujah! All our hopes and dreams and wishes come true!

Jesus seems to know this....because without missing a beat he continues

- *I know -- you're going to say "pull you act together buddy and show us some of your tricks like you did in Capernaum"*
- *But you're not going to like this one bit –*
- *But God's word is fulfilled? – look at some examples of what that means*
- *Remember that lesson we heard about Elijah? How when there was a famine he fed a widow?*
- *Well....there were lots and lots of starving Jewish widows around., but who did God tell him to go to? A foreigner!*
- *And remember the passage about Elisha curing lepers? Lots of lepers in our country -- but who did God tell him to cure? Namaan -- another foreigner!*
- *The fulfillment of God's word, Jesus is saying, is not about your hopes and dreams and wishes coming true*
- *It is about God's hopes and dreams and wishes coming true*

And Jesus' friends and neighbors get it....

- all their *oohss* and *ahhsss* turn into *throw this bum off the cliff, now*
- A little foretaste of what's going to happen in Jerusalem a few years later, when *Hosanna* on Sunday turns into *Crucify him* by Friday

It's a scandal: being God's chosen people doesn't mean they get the lion's share of God's goodness and love. It means they get their rightful share -- and so does everybody else

- They are the funnel, to help pour the vast ocean of God's love and mercy and justice into the world
- But that funnel doesn't have a stopper at the end -- it is not theirs to keep

- It is theirs to give away, so that all may enjoy it

Last week, at our Annual Meeting, we elected our vestry for the coming year

- These are the people who will lead us through figuring out what we're going to look like as a parish
- What our structure will be....how we'll organize ourselves... what supports we'll put in place to support our mission and ministry as this interim periods comes to an end

Now I've been in this parish 26 years (I know -- Mary will say I'm still a newcomer)

- Before I was ordained I've been on the Vestry a number of times, been Senior Warden a few times
- And never have I seen so many new, excited faces on the Vestry
- It is an exciting and blessed time for us!!

And as we walk that journey together, figuring out what we'll be, what we'll look like, we will do well to remember Jesus' hard words to his best friends

- *Its not about you*
- *Its about God*

We all have hopes and dreams and visions about what this parish might look like, what legacy we'll leave the children, happy in Sunday School as we sit here

- But the best legacy we can leave them is God's word, fulfilled
- God's hopes and dreams and wishes for this parish come true

How do we figure those out? Ahhh, there's the work for us to do....

- There's God's grace offered us

- To speak our visions honestly, and gently
- To listen with open ears
- Sifting, sorting, discerning where God leads us, where God sees God's word fulfilled
- So we may be a funnel of God's goodness and mercy and justice, poured out for the world

A colleague of mine often begins her sermons by saying the simple phrase *May only God's word be spoken, only God's word heard*

- Maybe that's not such a bad mantra for us in the months and years ahead
- *May only God's word be spoken, only God's word heard*
- Indeed!