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St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
4th Sunday after the Epiphany/Year C
February 3, 2019
Text: Luke 4: 21-30

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me: The Sequel’

This morning’s gospel continues where last week’s left off. Jesus, being driven by the Holy Spirit after his baptism into the wilderness came back to his hometown synagogue. It was there that he gave his inaugural address. He read the words from Isaiah which began “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...*” It was a great passage. The poor would hear the good news. Captives would be released. The blind would receive sight. The oppressed would go free. This would be the year of the Lord’s favor. After he finished reading, Jesus rolled up the scroll, sat down and then announced for all to hear, “*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*” Mike drop. Boom! Jesus had shared his mission statement right then and there in those few words. *Today* was the day of salvation and transformation. *Today* was the fulfilment of dreams and the promises made by Isaiah and all the prophets because *he* was in their midst. All was happening right in front of them and those gathered in the synagogue were the first to hear the good news.

Remember that the crowd sat waiting for Jesus to say more. “*All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.*” So far what Jesus said sounded great. They loved it. Little Jesus has grown up. We knew him back when. He has made something of himself. This is our hometown boy. He is going to take care of us. Or will he? They began to murmur amongst themselves, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” Ain’t this Joseph’s boy? Didn’t we help make him who he is today?

Their amazement soon turned into suspicion. Was it a look Jesus gave? Had he already known their thoughts? Things quickly began to go downhill.

Before we jump into judgement of his townspeople, aren’t there times we behave like them? We expect those close to us to remember us when they make it big, don’t we? We want that favor because we helped get them that job or position. The notoriety. Didn’t we help make them who they are today? We knew you when, we say.

But it seems that Jesus wasn't going to have any of that. After all, he had spent 40 days and 40 nights in the desert. He had enough time to think things through. Enough time to think of how, when, and where he would start his ministry. Enough time to discern what he would say about God and how he would *show* God's Kingdom manifested in the world. And like his cousin, John, he planned to lay it all on the line.

Much to their disappointment, Jesus began to tell them about the depth of God's love and power, love and power that extended beyond themselves, the people of Israel. He reminded them of how the prophet Elijah was sent in a dire time of famine to a foreign town called Zarephath and to a widow who was about to prepare a last meal for herself and her son. But because she shared her little bit of meal and oil with him, she and her household ate for days and she came to believe in the Lord God of Israel. Jesus also told them of God's goodness to the Syrian army commander, Naaman, who had been afflicted with leprosy. The prophet Elisha had been sent to this unclean foreigner and enemy of Israel and told him to go wash in the Jordan seven times. Reluctantly Naaman went and was cured and he too came to believe in the God of Israel.

We can only imagine the people asking among themselves, "Why is he telling us about the great things God did for them, those foreigners? Our enemies? We are the children of Abraham. We are the chosen ones. What about us? We want God to do for us what God did for them, those strangers! And you! You are one of us!" They grew angry because it sounded as if Jesus had rejected them, as if they had been betrayed, and by one of their own. That was enough to get a person, especially a prophet, killed. And Luke tells us that people took great offense and were ready to throw Jesus off a cliff. But that was not his time and he somehow passed through their midst.

But Jesus had made a point that day and would throughout his entire ministry. God would not be put in a box for God's love and power was meant to extend beyond the people of Israel. There would be no privilege, no exclusions in God's sight. Everyone, Jew and Gentile, foreigner and neighbor, slave and free, clean and unclean, the least and greatest are all recipients of God's grace, love, mercy, and favor. That is not always a popular stance and it is not always what we think or feel or how we behave, but it is always God's way. It is *the* way of love.

Jesus is also talking about God's love reaching out to folks that we don't get along with and people we can't stand, the folks that get on our last nerve, the folks we think we are better than. And maybe this is the crux of why the townspeople

were so angry. That God took the time for the other, the least, the enemy and so forth. And thankfully, God's ways are not our ways. God's way is the way of love.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" Jesus said, to bring good news to the poor, to release those who are captive, to give sight to the blind, to set those who are oppressed free, and to proclaim "the year of the Lord's favor." To ALL. Not to *some* of the poor, *some* of the captive, *some* of the blind, *some* of the oppressed, *some* people, *certain* parts of the world, *some* nations and *some* cultures. Nor to *some* Churches, *some* dioceses, *some* parishes, or to *some* other expressions of faith. BUT TO ALL.

And here's the challenge. If we want to live into our identity as one of God's beloved children; as Christians, as followers of Jesus—we have got to put our mindset on the way of Jesus, the way of God.

It is a scary world we live in sometimes and for many reasons. Children are bullied. Too many nationalities and cultures and groups are targeted with words and acts of cruelty and hate. The scales of justice are often not balanced and there will be reactions to that fact. Some of the desperate are doing things they would not ordinarily do. Social media has long since strayed off the path of relative politeness. And as theologian David Lose wrote in his commentary for the 4th Sunday after the Epiphany, "we live a walls-obsessed age." But we were not made to live like this, to live with envy and in fear and in suspect of one another or to profess a fake love for the other; otherwise we are nothing more than the "noisy gong" and that "clanging cymbal" that Paul spoke of in his First Letter to the Corinthians.

Jesus said that the greatest commandment of all is to love God and love your neighbor. Luke's Gospel makes it clear again and again that Jesus, the Word Incarnate, came for the sake of ALL and to show us the way. And so we must learn to live into our anointing and with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit so that we may act and to love as he did so that the scripture may be fulfilled in *our* hearing and in *our* being like him.

It isn't impossible for with God all things are possible. There is a way, God's way.

Our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, spoke these words last year at the marriage of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex: "We must discover the power of

love, the redemptive power of love. And when we do that, we make of this world a new world, for love is the only way.”

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” The Spirit of the Lord is upon us. May we live as if it truly is.

Amen.