

*Opening Our Ears and Eyes©*

Luke 4:16---21

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Don't you love this text in Luke? These are the first words we hear Jesus saying. It's like it's his inaugural speech, in a way. He goes home to Nazareth and goes into the synagogue where he must have gone many times, growing up. It is probably the place where he was educated – where he learned all about the Torah – where he learned how to read and to think what the Scriptures really meant.

At Synagogue, people were called on to read. And Jesus, the son of the carpenter, Joseph, is called up to read for the first time since he has become a man. He unrolls the scroll and he reads from Isaiah 61.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind.”

Then, as all teachers of authority would do in his day ... he sat down in the teacher's chair. And he said, “TODAY, this Scripture is fulfilled.”

Huh? What does he mean, today? They had been reading this passage for years and years and had been looking forward to the promised Messiah who was to come. But TODAY? In HIM?

Well, they had certainly heard good things about their hometown boy. And they were impressed with his reading. They gave nods of approval and probably whispered to one another about how proud Joseph and Mary must be.

But Jesus, being the Good News that he was, could not just leave it there. Nope, from the very beginning he told it like it was. And of course, the truth is often hard to hear ... especially if you aren't the poor, or the captive, or the blind.

He went on to tell these proud hometown folks that they would probably expect him to do great things right there in their town. But ... here it comes ... the good news isn't just for them! It isn't even just for the Jews! It is for ... yes ... Gentiles! The dreaded, hated, perverted, Gentiles!

He reminds them of the past and how they have read in Scriptures about other prophets who did not heal the people who thought they were God's chosen, but instead God chose to heal someone who was not one of them.

Oh, look out! The people did not like this. They were so mad they chased him to the stony cliff and were going to throw him off. This would be a stoning, not by throwing stones at the person, but by throwing the person at the stone

Call it providence or maybe just the people being so angry and distracted they didn't notice, but somehow, Jesus managed to "get out of Dodge." He just walked among them and out of the crowd, Luke tells us.

It's really hard to go home and preach to your own people. I tried it once, right out of seminary. It really was the stupidest thing I ever did! You could just see the wheels turning as I preached to those hometown peeps. I knew what they were thinking – I could see it their faces: "I remember when ... she was too ornery, she was more crazy about the boys in the church than she was learning about God ... she was in trouble, bad--- mouthing her mother, fighting with her sisters and brothers ... you know ... all the things home town people remember about you.

They can't really hear the Word spoken because of all the words going on in their heads. They can't see the Spirit in you ... or receive a message from you because, after all, they were the ones who taught you the messages.

Don't get me wrong. They were kind and complimentary and encouraging. And I was glad to say thank you for growing me in the faith and for the nurturing they gave to me as a family member.

Thank goodness they didn't try to throw me off a cliff! It wasn't that bad, after all, but then, I probably did not challenge them like Jesus did his hometown friends and family.

It is so difficult for hometown people to see the new creation in someone they've known all their lives.

It was that way for Jesus, only on a very large scale. Jesus, after all, was not just anybody from anywhere. He was telling the truth when he said, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in me."

Only Jesus could say that, of course. Only Jesus truly was the one they were waiting for, the Messiah they had longed for, the one who makes all things new.

But their eyes were closed. Yes, they were proud of him and how he read, but when those words of truth, straight from the mouth of God, came to them telling them that God's love and grace was far reaching, that was when they closed up their eyes to see and ears to hear.

So, what is the Word for us today? Do we ever have closed minds? Do we have such strong opinions about the people in the world who are different, who are needy, who think opposite of us, who look or act or dress different from us ... or even worship different from how we think is the right way ... do we allow our perspectives and our

beliefs to be a wall that keeps us from seeing the far---reaching grace of God that came to that synagogue in the hometown boy who was the Messiah, and who still comes to us today?

Are we able to have open hearts and minds for the ministry that is so much bigger and extends so much wider than our own little world?

If not, how different are we than those who would throw Jesus onto the stones, angry to hear the truth?

If we are open, how do we act on hearing that truth? If we believe in God's amazing grace that is for all ... what is the call that goes out to us as the Church? What can we do to spread grace and truth and to be as Jesus said he was – given the spirit of the Lord:

to bring good news to the poor; 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.'

May God bless and lead us; may He give us vision and a loud, clear call to what he would have us do with the hearing of this Word.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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