

January 23, 2022 Third Sunday of Epiphany

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

¹⁶When 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, ¹⁷and 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,

¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰And 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. ²¹Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

A verse and a half-long lesson and 9 words of a sermon.

**We don’t get a lot of quantity of Jesus in this snapshot
of his first sermon.**

We get quality that can’t be beat though.

He is filled with the Spirit. He has generated a buzz.

He’s a hometown hero ... both hype and hope.

**When this passage continues *next* Sunday, we get a
sense of what happens when the hype and the hope don’t**

line up in reality like they might in the imaginations of Jesus' friends and neighbors. That disturbing turn of events is hard to separate from what leads up to it.

But for now, for today, it sounds fantastic, doesn't it? Jesus proclaims the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 61, verse 1, in post-scroll-era parlance. These words also parallel the powerful proclamation of Mary when she visited Elizabeth. God is lifting up the lowly, standing up for the little guy, and setting the world right. And God's chosen her son for this liberating work.

Make no mistake. This is Mary's boy standing before the people assembled. How many more times do you think she proudly shared those prophetic words with anyone who would listen as Jesus grew up? How much more might she have seen in those years, that kept her steadfast in her belief that her son is unique, and he is destined for greater and

greater things? How hard might it have been to get anybody to listen, though, after a while?

Many a proud parent has a proud story of their child. Many of those stories come with a healthy dose of embellishment. Many of them become a bit too much for their hearers.

My grandmother was my prime promoter. She was an enthusiastic conversationalist anyway and she clerked at the only grocery store in town. The woman who would one day become my mother-in-law loved my grandma Edna and I have to admit it was strange ... five years after my grandma had died and I started to hang around Vanessa's house kind of a lot, her mom seemed to know things about me from years *I* was too young to remember. And she would laugh and recall that as fond as she was of Grandma Edna, sometimes, she just couldn't do it ... she needed to get somewhere, so she was going to have to pick a different

checkout line and save the story of my latest spelling test or story I wrote or geography I'd memorized for another day.

For all the expectation that had built around Jesus, now he was up in front of everyone and starting to really deliver. I'm sure he read from that scroll quite captivatingly, with its aspiring claims. And then, with the assurance of everyone's attention, all the build up is for him to say ... "It's me. You hear?"

It's a big, bold claim ... and I think maybe I just drew as much as I could from the 25- and 35-year-long echoes of what my Grandma used to say about me, because I just had the audacity to edit Jesus' thrift with words down to a paraphrase less than half their original count.

But yeah, by saying today this scripture has been fulfilled, Jesus says "it's me." He says he's going to do these things and it's like he has no interest in managing

expectations. It's so succinct, it's like poor uplifted, prisoners released, blind healed, oppressed free, Jubilee proclaimed. Check, check, check, check, check. Done.

Done?

Maybe that's where this starts to get tricky. I think we are conditioned to be skeptical and to know nothing is never quite this simple.

After all, today aren't we hearing this in a world where the poor aren't exactly so full of good news, they've had enough? Where prisons are overcrowded? Where blindness is a medical reality for some, and figuratively, what millions willfully choose to soothe ourselves? Where oppression takes many forms? And where a historical record can be found to show the year of the Lord's favor, the Jubilee, debts forgiven every 50 years, might never have happened once?

You hear?

I'm sure you do. I'm sure you don't need to be told again that it's a messed up world that we live in. I think we are all tired of hearing that.

But I want us to think about what it for Jesus to say, you hear? Or unabridged, this scripture has been fulfilled (it's me!) ... fulfilled in your hearing.

You hear?

I think those words must be important, too.

If Jesus had stopped at fulfilled, there would be nothing more for us to do than sit back and enjoy the show while Jesus restores the world. Or better than restore, make better than ever before.

But it happens in our hearing. Then as now. And by our hearing, our doing. We are the body of Christ. Paul's use of that metaphor with the Corinthians addresses that in very practical and meaningful ways. Any body needs different

parts to do different things to accomplish anything. And Jesus laid out this very ambitious role for the body of Christ.

And trying not to encroach too far into next week's continuation of this story, I'll confess I don't always like it this way. Sometimes I get mad, I get frustrated and I wish Jesus would have chosen to draw more on his divine nature and done a whole-world cleanup Mary Poppins style. I don't want to do it. I don't think I can. I can empathize more with the ear Paul is talking about that says, "I'm not an eye ... I don't belong, I'm not suited for this body and all it's meant to do."

I think any of us might feel similarly inadequate for such massive tasks. But as Paul says, feeling that way, it does not make you any less a part of the body of Christ. He goes on to say the weaker members of the body are indispensable. And I suspect we all know enough about how bodies work to know that bodies compensate. Parts grow stronger when

another part weakens and that helps what is hurt to heal. We need each other in this body of Christ.

And Christ needs us. For God's own reasons, whether I like it or not -- whether any of us does -- this is God's way of fulfilling this awesome and inspiring, but also daunting and difficult Word.

Making it not such a short story after all.

But one we are made to continue.

Amen.