

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 01/23/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Third Sunday After the Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, January 23rd

Luke 4:14-21

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Today

Being in the season of Epiphany, last week the lectionary focused on what John chose to record as Jesus' first public act of ministry - the wedding at Cana and the first of seven signs. Where John used a symbolic act, Luke chose to record Jesus' first public act of ministry as a sermon which is detailed in this week's Gospel lection. In just a few verses Luke describes a sermon Jesus delivered in his hometown in which He very clearly reveals His purpose, ministry, and indirectly, His identity. What are the implications of this sermon for us today?

Luke 4:14-21 Commentary

The Gospel lection immediately follows the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.

¹⁴ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form, like a dove, during His baptism (3:22). After His baptism, Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit (4:1).” On returning from the Jordan, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted by the devil (4:1-2). After His temptation in the wilderness, Jesus returns “in the power of” the Holy Spirit to Galilee (4:14). The four mentions of the Holy Spirit emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ ministry. This is further reinforced by the text in which Jesus later reads (v.18) from the prophet Isaiah.

The Markan and Matthean parallels focus only on Jesus' actions: *And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people* (Matthew 4:23); *And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons* (Mark 1:39). Only Luke notes the reaction of the people and how Jesus was *glorified by all*. The word transcribed as “glorified” has *doxa* as its root. “Glory” is often used in the New Testament to represent divine worship. Luke's word choice may simply refer to the fame or renown of Jesus through His preaching and teaching or there may be a deliberate connection to divinity.

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.

The piety of Jesus' parents was established in Luke 2:41-51 (the narrative of the boy Jesus in the temple). What is clear from this verse is that Jesus participated in the religious life of His community in His own right. He faithfully attended the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath. Perhaps His growing reputation as a teacher was the reason why He was selected to read and interpret the Scripture that Sabbath.

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 proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

The text indicates how Jesus was handed the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah but it was He who chose to read an amalgam of Isaiah 61:1; 58:6; 61:2. Given what Jesus says in v.20, we know Jesus is claiming to be the messianic servant and He is aware of the Spirit's anointing. What follows is the blueprint for Jesus' ministry:

- (1) *To bring the good news to the poor.* In the Old Testament "the poor" (same Greek word is used in the Septuagint as used here, *ptōchois*) referred not necessarily just to the economically poor but also to the pious poor - those who were humble, devout, and dependent upon God. There are spiritual implications here. There is good news to the people who have waited and have longed for God.
- (2) *To proclaim liberty to the captives.* In the Old Testament this referred to those held captive in exile. The exile itself was seen as a punishment to Israel for the sins of the nation. Again, there is a deeper meaning here. Elsewhere in Luke-Acts, "liberty" often refers to forgiveness of sins (see also Matthew 1:21).
- (3) *Recovering of sight to the blind.* This refers to both physical and spiritual blindness.
- (4) *Set at liberty those who are oppressed.* This refers to healing the sick, casting out demons, addressing the oppression by the legalism of man's law added to God's Law and promoting biblical justice.
- (5) *Proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor.* This refers to the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25:25-28) that saw personal liberty, restitution of property, and a simple life. Jesus' life and work on the cross enables our release from the debt that we owe for our sins. Through Christ our relationship with God, lost because of Adam, is restored by the New Adam.

²⁰ *And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

The act of sitting down indicates Jesus is about to start teaching. Rabbis taught sitting down. All eyes were upon Him expectantly and He certainly did not disappoint - *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."* Jesus has proclaimed His mission and purpose. Indirectly, Jesus also proclaimed His identity.

Reflections

Luke seems to emphasize the word "today" in his Gospel. In addition to its use here in 4:20, we find: *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (2:11); And when Jesus came to the place, he*

looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today” (19:5); And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham (19:9); And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (23:43). To Luke, “today” is the moment of transformational change brought about by an encounter with Jesus. Jesus invades our todays.

Just a few weeks ago during Advent, our attention was focused on what was to come. We reflected as a church community on both the second coming of Christ at the end of history and His first coming. During the Epiphany we have reflected on the nature of the revelation and manifestation of God in Jesus. The Gospel lection today challenges us to shift our minds from what is to come and from what has already come, to *today*. Jesus’ words, “*Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*” (v.20) have meaning and implications for Jesus’ disciples every single day. The daily fulfillment of this Scripture occurs in the lives of and through the lives of Christ’s disciples by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit that descended upon Jesus during His baptism, that drove Jesus out into the wilderness, that Jesus was in the power of as He returned to Galilee, was the same Holy Spirit that was poured out at Pentecost, and is the same Holy Spirit at work in us that enables us to continue Christ’s ministry described in the text in our time and place – to be the hands and feet of Christ in our communities.

How did this message land on Jesus’ audience at the Synagogue in Nazareth? That is the focus of next week’s Gospel lection. How does this message land on us today? To what extent do we allow the Spirit to work in us today?

