

The Third Sunday of Epiphany—
St. Luke 4:14-21
January 27th, 2019
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

What Are You Waiting For?
“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Today we celebrate the Third Sunday of the Epiphany season, when we remember the early beginnings of the ministry of Jesus, as he returns to his hometown of Nazareth where he grew up. Jesus visits the local Synagogue and opens the Isaiah scroll and reads a portion of it about the Good News being breached to the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed.

In the First Covenant reading this morning, Ezra also read a scroll of the Law in front of all the people, and the text records that many wept as they heard the words. This is likely because they now understood that they had failed in many ways to keep the law of God, as Ezra gave the interpretation of the words to the people. They knew, but they did not know. They also understood the age-old adage that ‘ignorance of the law is no excuse for breaking the law.’ And so, they stood, feeling accused by the words. It was not exactly a hope filled moment. It was a moment that people were left feeling shame and God’s judgment upon them.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” These words which Jesus read from Isaiah are very familiar and also challenging and hope-filled words with which any Jew would be familiar. We too should be familiar with them. We have heard them many times before. Jesus has come to preach the good news. The world will be turned upside down. The good news is that God the creator cares about us and loves us. The good news is that those who are vulnerable and who have been used and abused in this life for the purposes and benefit of others, will no longer be held down to this low estate. The sick will be healed in new ways. Those who have been held a prisoner, either by themselves or others, will be set free.

After he finishes reading the text, he announces to the assembled congregation, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." How do we believe these

words will be fulfilled in our own generation? Are they still good news to us? Can we identify as a people to whom that news is preached?

Good News. Really? The news of our world is so disturbing and concerning almost every day now. It begins to feel toxic if you take too much of it in. Shootings. Murders. Health warnings about products you use. Climate change getting worse each month, with its symptoms, violent weather, never mind the violence in our streets around the world in Paris, Venezuela and other places. Mass shootings and killings, several even this week. Our government dissembling. Even the church is wrapped in scandals. It's all a bit much! Where is there any hope? Where indeed, any good news?

"Today these words are fulfilled in your hearing!" The Good News still comes from Jesus. There is little good news to be found on the Internet or the cable news outlets. Most people aren't drawn to watch the good news, so there is less of that shown. The old newspaper adage is still true: 'If it bleeds, it leads.' Where do you suppose we should look for Good News, for a little light in the darkness? And what are you waiting for?

Some now wait to win the lottery. It is the hope of many of us. We wait for good news to be returned to us in a set of cold, emotionless, indifferent, passionless, and neutral numbers. It is the prayer of 10's of millions for millions. We all need hope. If it costs a few dollars each week, why not? I won't throw water on anyone's hope, but is this the best place to place your dreams and your hopes? How likely is it to deliver for you?

What are you waiting for? Some wait for vacation. A break from the work and the toil. We dream of happy times with family and friends. We dream of peace, escape and rest. Whether it be cruises at sea or sight-seeing or hiking in the national parks and enjoying nature by a walk in the woods or along the beach, these are dreams that for many of us seem within our reach. Yet for others, they remain only faint dreams and hopes and beyond their ken and grasp. Vacations are fun, they come and they go, and they are always too short. The next one is like a carrot dangling in front of us...how soon will the next one be?

What are we waiting for? Retirement? Some hold out hope for this. But if you have not lived a fairly healthy life leading up to retirement, you may find you will be limited in what you can do or that you won't get that much time to rest from your labors and enjoy yourself. For many today, as in the 1930's, dreams of retirement are elusive, knowing they must work until they drop or cannot work any longer, whichever comes first. And this comes after a lifetime of hard work. It doesn't

seem fair, and it is not. At least there is Social Security, which they did not have in the 1930's, but it is not enough to live on by itself. Where is the good news here? Good news is, that if you were wise and made good plans, you do have the opportunity to enjoy retirement. I have seen many who do. And still there is time for all of us to work on and prepare for this hope and this dream, as elusive as it might seem. Retirement can be good news for some, if we prepare to live it as good news in our hearts that we aim to share with others. It may be our last chance to get life right.

What are you waiting for? Real Hope. Imagine your dreams are fulfilled. You have won the lottery. What would that look like for you? When I think about it, I realize, I have already won the lottery, and I need to wake up and realize it. I have been showered with an abundance of blessings in my life, both materially and in terms of the people in my life. This is my real hope. These are my lottery winnings. I need to be grateful for what I have won already, and not be greedy for more. Whatever I have ever needed, God has provided. I need to trust in God. God will provide. Gratefulness is what I need, not more stuff or money. I need to count my blessings every day, every minute, especially when I am feeling hopeless and wanting. What am I waiting for?

What are you waiting for? Hope? Real hope is fulfilled on this day in your hearing. Jesus has promised us, and this is God's promise to you. You want your feelings of guilt to go away? Today you are forgiven. Those things you have felt guilty about are lifted from your shoulders. You feel like a loser? Today you are a winner with Jesus. Keep running the race and do not quit. Victory is yours!

What are you waiting for? It is already here. Open your eyes. See the good around you. Notice the good on the news, instead of the bad. They often put it at the end of the newscast or on the back pages of the newspaper, but it is there. People saving other people's lives, risking their own. Heroic deeds of helping and kindness. People cleaning up the environment, one piece of trash at a time. People visiting the sick in their homes, bringing a casserole, or visiting in the hospitals. Forgotten prisoners getting visits and ministry and hope. People working long hours to heal the sick and minister to the dying. People finding homes for the homeless, or at least sharing a coat and a blanket. People dedicated to finding homes for pets that were strays or abandoned. People adopting such pets and loving them. Pets loving us back. An army veteran with one leg stopping to help General Colin Powell change his tire when it went flat this week. There is so much good news in the world. Be a part of it. Spread the good news in word and in deed. In word with kind and hope-filled words, words which give witness to the truth that, today these words are fulfilled in your hearing because of a Jewish man who lived 2000 years

ago and they are fulfilled in your hearing because of the good deeds you can do in His name and by His love.
AMEN.