

Luke 4:14-21

20th Sunday after Pentecost

Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When 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, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And 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. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

I worked for a couple of years, in the beginning of my ministry, as a hospital chaplain. In a place where many people are experiencing some of the worst days and moments of their lives; you can never be sure about what might be waiting through the next door you go through. It's a place that brings out strong emotions and strong reactions and the most important thing a chaplain brings is the ability to be a calm (and hopefully, *calming*) presence. In ministry jargon, this is called being a non-anxious presence.

As a Christian chaplain there is also the desire to bring something of the Good News to those in the midst of anxiety and suffering, though not explicitly. This is one of those places where it's better to share the Gospel *without* words. Of course, one shouldn't bring false hope; the Good News we offer isn't necessarily the good news an anxious patient or family member is hoping to hear.

Probably like many people, I wonder what it would have been like to be in the physical presence of the earthly Jesus; to see his eyes, to hear his voice, to feel the warmth of his embrace. This passage from Luke's Gospel tells of the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. He has come back to his hometown, Nazareth, shortly after being baptized and then tempted in the wilderness. He goes to visit the Synagogue, the very one where he had gone his whole life, with people who have known him since he was a baby.

The passage ends here, but the story continues that after hearing Jesus speak and hearing of how he was the bearer of God's good news, everyone was pretty excited. But their excitement didn't last long because Jesus went on to say that even though God was active and that through Jesus much was about to change, and for the better, it didn't necessarily mean that folks in Nazareth would be getting special treatment. They got

angry and worked up enough that they arose in a fury and tried to kill Jesus by throwing him over a cliff.

We often struggle, I think, with the gap between what is the 'common' good and what is good for *me*. Generally, we think things that benefit me and mine are surely good and things that might cause us disruption or challenge to be obviously bad; while, at the same time thinking that everyone else should agree with our assessments.

The paradox of faith is that the Good News is real and active in our lives and in our world while, at the same time, evil is also present and active in our lives and in our world. The easy path is to decide that God is impotent, that good and bad are meaningless distinctions, and that we achieve our best lives by indulging our every whim and desire.

Jesus warns us against taking that easy path though. The path to fulfillment, to an abundant life, is much narrower and more challenging. Faith is what allows us to see the evil around us and remain committed to living in God's kingdom in the here and now. The real Good News unfolds around us slowly and from unexpected places. It enters in where we aren't expecting it but enter in it does. The love of Jesus is being fulfilled in our hearing and right before our very eyes.