



ST. MICHAEL'S SERMONS

Greenville, SC

January 21, 2007

Luke 4:14-21

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"Homecoming"

"He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up..."

He came home.

Homecoming...Jesus, the hometown boy returns to the place where everybody knows his name, a big fish in a little pond, the all-star, the town's son, "one of their own."

In our culture ***Homecoming*** has many meanings. Most people know it as "an annual tradition of the when people, towns, high schools and colleges come together, usually in late September or October, to welcome back former residents and alumni. There is often a football game at which a homecoming Queen and King are crowned." It's a good time for all.

Having grown up in the Baptist Church, before becoming Lutheran in middle school, I remember Church homecomings as an exciting time when we had special music and singing at worship, a big dinner after church, and families that had moved away came back to visit. It was a time of fellowship and fun, a celebration!

In today's Gospel lesson from Luke, we read that Jesus has come back to the place where he had been brought up, Nazareth. A homecoming of sorts, but this homecoming was not as warm and welcoming as we would imagine.

Nazareth's own has come back and He has something to say and he's preaching it in the synagogues, and from what we hear the people aren't so sure how to take what he says. Some are filled with admiration, some with wondering and still others are filled with doubt.

Jesus unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and read, "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."

With this reading from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus has laid out for the people of Nazareth ***who*** He is and ***what*** his public ministry will be. He is the Christ, Son of God, anointed by the Spirit of the Lord to be God's servant. The scroll that he reads from, Isaiah 61, is a servant song and in this song "anointed" literally means "Christ or Messiah." For the first time the people of Nazareth are seeing Jesus as a man, an adult; no longer the babe lying in a manger, no longer the toddler playing by his mother's side. For the first time in his hometown Jesus is announcing ***He is Messiah... Jesus the Christ... The anointed one.***

He's is all grown up, he's traveled to lands near and far and now he's come home to preach to those who watched him grow from a boy into a man; an interesting dynamic.

I remember the first sermon I ever preached, the Sunday after Christmas 1995. I stood before my home congregation in Columbia, an energetic 10th grader, bubbling with anxious excitement. The congregation was encouraging and supportive. I was young and inexperienced.

My journey to this place began that day as I stood behind the pulpit for the first time, surrounded by the people who have watched me grow from a girl into a woman; from a teenager into a Pastor. Since that day almost 12 years ago, I've returned home to preach at least 3 times and I'm pretty sure the people in the pews still see that cute little brown haired 10th grader. Even though I haven't grown an inch since that day, they know I'm no longer 15, but they still don't quite see me as an adult.

I imagine that's some of what was happening in Nazareth. Not only did Jesus return home a man, he returned home a man with a mission, a ministry, a message.

What a scandal... "One of their own," *Jesus*, is anointed with the Spirit of the Lord, Joseph the carpenter's **son** is God incarnate, God made man, flesh and blood living among them. How can that be?

As I read these verses I was reminded of Joan Osborne's popular song, "One of Us." The song explores the incarnation, the finite holding the infinite. The song asks, "*What if God was one of us? If God had a name, what would it be, and would you call it to His face, if you were faced with him in all his glory, what would you ask if you had just one question. What if God was one of us, just a stranger among us, trying to make his way home.*"

The people of Nazareth may have been asking and wondering, how is it that our own hometown boy is the Messiah? The chosen one. It's almost unreal to imagine.

It's almost unreal to imagine that God is one of us. That He became one of us when he sent his Son Jesus Christ to live and work just as we do. That God became human like you and me when His only Son suffered and died for us.

Today as we hear Jesus' words again, are we, like the people of Nazareth, scandalized by God's physical presence as "one of us" in our everyday lives. How **do** we respond to a God who shares in our human condition and walks among us? A God who calls us to a life of service and sacrifice. How do we respond to this God?

It is interesting that in Luke's Gospel the first public word Jesus speaks as an adult, apart from reading Scripture, is the word "**Today**." "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." In the Greek, the word for today literally means now, this time, the present. Jesus is saying, The age of God's reign is here now! The time when God's promises are fulfilled and God's purpose comes to fruition has arrived; there will be changes! No more waiting, the day has come for those who have waited and hoped; changes for the poor, the wronged and the oppressed will happen **today**. This is the beginning of the jubilee, the celebration, the **homecoming**.

Jesus doesn't say tomorrow or next week. The ministry Jesus speaks of is for **today**. Not yesterday, tomorrow, or a vague "someday." "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."

Because he has anointed me...today...

Jesus has been anointed. Anointed to a ministry that he clearly defines for us. Because He is anointed, and we are his children, so are we anointed into the ministry he speaks of. Baptized into one body, the hands and feet of Christ in the world, each of us are members of this one body, with our own God given talents and gifts. We all have a part in this ministry, whether we've discovered our place yet or not.

Last weekend at Lutheridge I sat around a table filled with enthusiastic and passionate people that you and God anointed to go up to the mountain to pray, plan and prepare for ministry here at St. Michael Lutheran Church. This week the council has returned to this place to share with all of us the exciting things they discovered while on the mountain. They have returned to anoint each of us to be active in the ministries of St. Michael. To pray, plan and prepare with them. They need us, they can't do it alone.

I got excited seeing how powerful an anointing can be!

Jesus has been anointed, the council has been anointed, each of us has been anointed and it just keeps going and going.

Now is the time, the time to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, **today**... not someday, not yesterday, not tomorrow, but today.

Today we are anointed, today we are called!

Jesus the Christ stands before us, "one of us" and calls us to the ministry which he himself lived and died for. Not only have we been called but we've been anointed by God to do as our Savior has done; to pray and to live as he prayed and as he lived.

Knowing this, hearing this word, do we wait? Do we wait for a time when we feel we have more to give, a time when we feel we're better prepared? Do we wait for a time when things seem to fit into place just a little bit better? When we have more money, when we have more time. People of St. Michael, I ask you, do we wait? Do we wait to be the Church in this place, the Church beneath the cross?

Do we wait to proclaim to the world that we serve the risen Christ?

The Gospel tells us we do not. Jesus' words tell us we do not wait. Today we give food to the poor, today we advocate for the wronged, today we love those that others ignore, today we give a voice to those who cannot speak, today we teach our children, today we fellowship, today we sing, today we worship, today we offer and receive forgiveness, today we live out our Baptism, today we give the gift of ourselves, ***today we are the Church, today, today, today!***

Yes! The anointing, the call that goes out from Jesus as he stands before the people at Nazareth, as he stands before us today, is that nudging deep inside that pulls or pushes us to the place where we are needed. It's the passion that fills our eyes with awe when we discover that our time and talent do make a difference in the life of the church.

The call, the anointing that we experience here in this place are what remind us that we are not alone. Jesus spoke the words of ministry to the crowd gathered at the synagogue and He speaks the word to each of us here today. And He gives us the strength and the courage to do these things because we are his children, the children of a living God.

We never have to wonder, like Joan Osborne's song, what if God was one of us, because we already know he is. We know when we see the faces of each child that eagerly gathers at the foot of this altar to be fed by the word of God. We know when we hold the trembling hand of one who weeps and needs a friend. We know when our wall is filled with cards from people who care how we are. We know when someone notices when we're not there and calls to tell us. We know when we kneel together in prayer for a broken and hurting world. We know when we stretch out our hand and receive the body and the blood of the one who died for us.

We know that Jesus the Christ is among us. Look around, we know because we aren't alone. We are in this ministry together.

Today is the day! Jesus has come back to the place where he was brought up.

Each day as we celebrate Word and Sacrament, as we live as the body of Christ in the world, and even when we fail to do so, Jesus comes to us, stands before us, among us, within us, anointing us, gathering us in, nourishing us with the word, refreshing us with living water and strengthening us with his body and blood, to carry out the ministry he has set before us.

We know that Jesus Christ is truly in this place and we celebrate His homecoming!

Thanks be to God!

Amen