

The Carpenter's Son

January 31, 2010

St. Paul's - Richmond United Church

Fourth Sunday After Epiphany

Luke 4:21-30

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

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Every so often we hear in a new way something that is very familiar. This happened to me when I heard Fred Craddock in Victoria. He was preaching on Jesus' baptism and he pointed to Luke's description of it. In it, Jesus lines up with all the others. Lines up, not taking any special place. Lines up with all who line up: the poor, the rich, the soldiers, the shepherds, and all who seek. Lines up.

This insight was in my mind when I read this week's text. We have the reaction to Jesus reading in the synagogue. This activity was a normal event in the Jewish male's spiritual journey. Think of it this way - Jesus turns up in worship and takes his turn in reading the assigned text. Turns up, reads and then the mumbling begins - first that was interesting. And then when it sinks in - "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

We have all done this - listened, began to be moved and then held back. Isn't this the snot nose little kid I use to know? I remember him in high school.

Whatever was the message, it was double edged. We were attentive to the narrative, warmed by it, and then the challenge emerged. "Hold it. Let me think about this." Of course there are times to rethink, to examine. Some narratives seduce us, causing us to go in the wrong direction, to follow some really bad ideas. Not all ideas are worthy of us.

Luke is not talking about that good second thought, second look. He is writing about a moment of transformation, a narrative causes us to re-examine all our taken for granted reality.

Reading the passage literally, that is, as literature, Luke wants us to hear the moment of transformation. Line up for the kingdom of God is here. Line up for it is for all people. Line up it is in all people.

Show up and read the text- it can be done by anyone. Yet here, in the reading, in the showing up, something new emerges. Not new in the sense of never been. But a reminder that the kingdom of God is present. It comes in the response. In the listening. "Today this scripture has come true as you listen." True as you listen. True as you respond.

Here is the catch. A catch that makes the listener have second thoughts. The text itself. The Spirit of God is where the outsider is no longer the outsider. It is when the insider and the outsider dance the beauty of God. People are healed. The prisoner cared for. The blind see. In ordinary time extra ordinary compassion. And it is here, right before you. It is here all around you.

Hold it. Wasn't this the carpenter's daughter? We saw her smoking out behind the barn. We saw her skate boarding where you shouldn't. Really, in her the kingdom of God has come? I know, I know she claims to be different but let us gossip for a moment - remember the dance?

So our first reaction is pleasure and then slowly the questions. Pleasure at the person, that daughter or son of the community who has spoken better than expected. Then the questions of whether we can trust the message because of the messenger. Then, and this is the real kicker, what was said. It hit home.

As the words washed over the hearers they were happy but, and this is a real but, they began to hear the call. This call to bring compassion and justice to all activity. This call that could end - where it did end for the prophet and then Luke's people - hanging on a wooden cross. It was a call for them and us.

Here we listen with double intent. What it meant for Luke's community and what it means for us.

The face of the church had changed in Luke's time. It was now mostly a gentile community. Listening carefully we see this shift in geography. This should not be read as a rejection of Judaism or the roots of our faith. It is a word to those who now are called to be the witnesses to the way, to live the way, in a new geography. Luke has universalized the kingdom of God. It is an whole earth theology. The kingdom is everywhere where people live with compassion and beauty. There are no excuses, for it is here. To a community having some fear, these are strong words. It is up to them. Luke is telling them - "Get over it and get on, you are now the people of the way."

A natural response is to hold back. The feeling is "not me Lord." Send someone else.

So when the word comes from a place we don't expect it, or we know too much about the source, we get resistant. Often in our resistance we turn on the speaker. Thus this phrase - "a prophet has no honor" - has reverberated down through the ages. The problem with prophets is they make us uncomfortable. They make us rethink when we are happily stuck in the middle again. The call often seems to be difficult, too demanding and we feel we are not up to the task.

We have the insight and someone says "make it happen." No. No. We were just thinking out loud. The idea was half formed. We are not ready. And the prophet says, "make it happen." And this prophet is the person down the street, the one we have coffee with, the child who wonders, the one we raised.

There is no big flashing sign to tell us this is the big moment. It is not like the lights of Broadway that turn night into day. The idea has crept in on cat's feet. The idea appeared with no warning. This is how it was, then and today. Is this not Joseph's son.? If this is meant to be a big thing how come it has slid in without us noticing it. Something about his way compiles us to leave comfortable places and ideas to journey into new territories of life.

There are all sorts of people in our lives who have called us to compassion and justice. Some of them very unexpected and very ordinary. It is the ordinariness that makes us question. For shouldn't there be flashing lights and loud announcements, for is this not a big moment? No, epiphanies are always around us, working their way into our consciousness. They come in ordinary guise, ordinary experience. Their very ordinariness awaken us and tell us transformation is happening. They are grounded in our worship.

We sit in church. We walk on the river side. We walk in the woods. We share a coffee, there is quiet conversation. And then an epiphany. The world looks different. It is bigger than all of us. This kingdom of God thing. It is here. It surrounds us. We are Graced. We are loved. Now we turn to the world and live it - make it happen.

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