

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C, 2110
Luke 4:14-21
The Rev. Ronald N. Johnson

We are jumping around some in the lectionary lessons. Our gospel reading last Sunday came from John's Gospel. Today, it comes from Luke's. To put today's story into chronological order, the event occurred immediately after Jesus returned from his meditations in the wilderness, following his baptism.

There was a custom in vogue during the time of Jesus that when a visiting rabbi came to town, the people would invite him to expound, at synagog on the Sabbath, on the Old Testament scriptures in what today we would call a sermon. So, it was not at all unusual that the locals invited Jesus to read and to preach. Jesus took a scroll of the prophet Isaiah and unrolled it to the point where it says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, proclaim to captives their freedom, restore sight to the blind, free the oppressed and proclaim the Jubilee year." When he read this, he re-rolled the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and said, "Today, this scripture is fulfilled right before you."

The lectionary reading for today leaves us here without a suggestion about the congregation's reaction. We must wait until next Sunday to find out what happened. But, I'll tell you now that what happened after Jesus said that wasn't pretty. What happened is that all hell broke loose and Jesus had to flee for his life from his own hometown. As a parting shot, Jesus left them with these words, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country." These prophetic words would be ultimately fulfilled in the Jewish rejection of Jesus, but we need to leave this until next Sunday so that it fits with the finish of this story.

Today, we should focus on the affirmation, not the rejection. The hope of humanity everywhere is a hope of liberation, from whatever demons hold people in bondage. The bondage might be political oppression; it might be poverty or any number of other things, but the depressive nature of bondage, whatever it is, wears one down to the bone with unhappiness and despair. It grates against the spirit and brings despondency to the soul. The despondency results in anger and depression and leads to what some theologians have called the dark nights of the soul.

The Gospel today tells us that Jesus came to shine light into that darkness. The Gospel says that faith in Christ allows us to hope, to feel God's love, to know that no matter what our condition that in Christ nothing can separate us from God's love. When we understand this, when we experience this love, we are indeed set free of bondage and we can live our lives in the fullness of the Gospel, liberated, joyful, vibrant as never before, because in Christ we are joined with God. *Amen.*