

February 12, 2017 “The Marks of the Messiah” Luke 4:14-30

It is remarkable to be able to say this. I have been there. I have been to the synagogue in Nazareth. Like so many other buildings in the Holy Land it is a ruin. No roof, no woodwork. But the stone walls and floor, the stone pillars, the stone benches on either side of the sanctuary are all there, as they have been for more than 2,000 years. This ruin has been visited by pilgrims, Christians for most of that time. Our host read this passage from a scroll as Jesus would have read. And one of the things I am still amazed by is the ease, the absolute ease with which these Jewish tour guides, licensed by the state say, “This is where Jesus would have stood and this is what Jesus read.” In Nazareth. In the synagogue that HE would have attended with HIS father Joseph and HIS mother Mary. Sabbath after Sabbath. Shabbatt after Shabbatt. And I find this really amazing...those facts, and those images are almost never mentioned in Theological Colleges and Seminaries.

Jesus taught in the area of Judea, the Roman name for that province of the Empire. And Nazareth is in the Galilee, today the northern third of Israel. He went to HIS home town, the place where HE was raised. The place where he apprenticed with HIS father Joseph in the trade of carpenter. And that means the congregation that was in attendance had seen HIS budding abilities and they were familiar with Joseph's ability to make things out of wood. Not houses. Everything in Nazareth would have been built of stone. But furniture and tools, looms for weaving cloth and some cooking and household utensils. Which is to say, HE was more of a woodworker than what we associate with the term carpenter.

Sabbath is the period from sundown on Friday to sundown Saturday. We forget and seldom think about the fact that the earliest Christians were Jewish in their background, and what caused them to change their worship day from the Sabbath or Saturday to Sunday was not a doctrinal debate but rather the unquestionable reality, the experience of the resurrection of Jesus on the 3rd day following the crucifixion.

And here we find another detail concerning Jesus' spirituality that is only mentioned in the best of commentaries. It is really interesting how many

commentaries skip over this detail as though it were insignificant. “As was his custom.” On Sabbath Jesus regularly attended the worship services in the local synagogue, when HE could, the synagogue in Nazareth. In other words HE was a regular at church. He assembled with those who regularly assembled to worship. HIS custom, is a highly important detail. In other words we sometimes make too much of Jesus the “rebel”. HE regularly, week by week did what believers do. HE gathered with people of faith, and did what they do in worship. And that means HE heard the Scriptures read and attended the time given to teaching.

One more thing. This is the beginning of Jesus second year of ministry. I keep saying that the Gospels are not biographies in the modern sense. We have one boyhood story. The balance of these accounts are a fistful of stories from HIS second and third years of ministry. And then there is in each case a lot of detail about what happened in the week that led up to HIS crucifixion and resurrection. If you ask the question “what did Jesus do in the first year of HIS ministry?” the answer is in verse 14. “HE returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about HIM spread through the whole countryside. HE taught in their synagogues and everyone praised HIM.”

It is not that things of little importance happened in HIS first year of ministry in Galilee. In fact Jesus anticipates in the events that happened that day at HIS home town synagogue...‘You probably want to say to me, do here in your hometown what you did in Capernaum!’ It is a reference to miracles of healing, casting out of demons, signs and wonders that have already become part of Jesus' reputation and part of His popularity. Capernaum is not terribly far from Nazareth. And Jesus reputation was built on the best kind of publicity there is...people talking to one another about what they have seen, heard and witnessed in the first person.

What Jesus read that morning was a little portion from the Book of Isaiah. Chapter 61:1-2. It was a portion that Jews accepted without question as describing the Messiah who was to come, and for whom many were

3.

waiting. Please remember this: the references to the Messiah in the Old Testament were not identified by the Church, or the disciples, or Christians. It was the Jewish scholars before Jesus came on the scene who so identified passages like Isaiah 53, and 62:1-2. Jesus read this portion on that morning because HE knew they would hear it as a reference to the Messiah. HE also knew they have heard about HIS first year of ministry in Galilee. He is about to say...connect the dots...today and here in Nazareth these words have become a reality...you know what happened in Capernaum!

So what really happened in Capernaum? The same thing that happened in Galilee in general when Jesus went and taught in the villages and towns, meeting people in their synagogues and preaching and teaching in fields and on hillsides. Back in verse 14 Luke tells us Jesus did what he did, in the power of the Spirit of God. What that means is whether it was a conversation, an opportunity for questions to be asked and answers given, or that they brought their sick to HIM, or if they had evil spirits in them, what Jesus did and said, they perceived that the power of God was in HIM, and they felt that God had blessed them because they were there and saw with their own eyes and heard with their own ears. They were convinced they were witnesses to what God was doing in Galilee. God touched their lives, as we say in real time.

Now, I have just spoken in generalities. Jesus makes it possible for us to see some specifics. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." That is what Isaiah had written. When Jesus says, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing," HE is saying what you have heard happened in those towns and villages in the rest of Galilee? It's true. It's all true. I ministered, and God was in the evidence.

"He anointed me to preach good news to the poor." It's true. Today...I tell you that is what is happening. Poor people in tens and fifties and by the hundreds. I preached the good news of the kingdom and ordinary poor folks came to listen and to rejoice that it was for them, and they praised God that they had had the chance to hear and see, and this is bottom line...they praised God to see the day.

4.

“He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners.” Jesus is saying on the Sabbath in HIS hometown synagogue, “It is happening. Over and over we saw people who were prisoners of sin, set free, able to feel what it like to know you are God's child. To be able to turn the page and begin a whole, new life, cleansed of the things that bound them in their old lives. People were set free. And people will be set free by what I will continue to do in the time that remains. God is good. People are hearing that God loves them. And that fact changes everything.”

“He sent me to proclaim the recovery of sight to the blind.” People who had lost their vision came to me. It is true. In the power of the Spirit of God, I opened their eyes. They saw. People who were born blind came to me. They went away, singing and dancing and praising God because they could see for the first time. “

“He sent me to release the oppressed.” It happened. People who were literally captives of the devil waiting to die. I commanded evil spirits to come out of them and they did, and the people were restored to their right minds, and they recognized that the grace of God, the love of God, the Kingdom of God was for them.”

He sent me to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” In short, Jesus taught and ministered with accompanying signs and wonders that this is a new age for the sighing sobbing multitudes of the world. He presented himself as the answer to all the troubles that torment us. And it is true, whether you think of these ills in a physical sense or a spiritual sense Jesus is the answer. And notice this...notice this...HE did not talk of the judgement of God so much as HE proclaimed this age as the age of the grace of God, the time when ordinary people can be touched forever by the salvation of God.

Those are the marks of the Messiah. I did not say that, the saints, prophets and priests of Israel said that. That is one of the reasons the Old Testament Scriptures remain important to the New Testament communities of believers. And part of the message of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in writing the Gospels is to tell us

the marks of the Messiah are found in the Old Testament...and Jesus alone measures up to every one of them.

In that place, Nazareth, in that synagogue, where HE was well known, Jesus read this portion which describes the ministry of the Messiah. What Jesus said was, "I am here." What HIS ministry proclaimed in Capernaum and Galilee, and Judea and Jerusalem, is what a Roman soldier would say, standing at the foot of the cross of Jesus, "Surely this was the Son of God.

Let us pray;

Lord God, help us to recognize this same truth has been revealed to us. Heavenly Father, help us to remember that Jesus offers this same liberty and healing to us. Holy Spirit, grant that we may know that we too have seen this same Spirit of power active in the world and in our lives. Grant us the grace and the strength to continue to praise the name of Jesus and find our place in your Kingdom.
In Jesus name we pray. Amen.