

May 2, 2021 A Hard Reality Luke 4:14-30

Dearly Beloved;

My note to you today is going to be very brief. Barbara and I are well. We are spending as much time as we can at the farmhouse, because of the ease with which we can socially isolate there. We literally see no one. The birds are back and come to our feeders in great numbers and variety. The daffodils have bloomed, the leaves are breaking out on the trees and very soon the lilacs will flower. The experience of peace is what we feel the greatest of need for, and we find it in that place. May you also find moments and places where you can be safe and enjoy the peace of God's presence. Let us turn to the lesson in Luke's Gospel, chapter 4, verses 14 to 30.

This particular passage causes the memories of our 2015 trip to Israel to come flooding back. In the city of Nazareth, we visited the ruin of this famous synagogue. It would have been a special place for Jesus. It was surely one of the places in HIS home town where meaningful moments occurred as he grew in stature before his neighbours, among his family, and most importantly, before HIS Heavenly Father. One of the things that we did in the midst of the ruin, was we read...I was asked to read...the lesson that Jesus read from Isaiah 61... "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, to preach good news to the poor." For me it was an emotional moment, standing where I knew Jesus had stood, reading what Jesus had read.

And the truth is I had not gotten over an experience which occurred on the bus ride that took our tour group to a rebuild of Nazareth as it would have appeared in Jesus time, a small rural village. Our group was on the bus. I was sitting at a window. Our tour guide said, "By the way, for those on the left side of the bus at this next corner you can look up the cliff where they tried to kill Jesus. Suddenly there was this sheer face of rock. I looked up and experienced vertigo. It was so high. All I could think, is that no one pushed off that cliff could have survived! And we were around the corner, and it was gone. It was one of the moments in Israel, when I collided with the reality, the stark factual reality, of the Gospel details.

Luke chapter 4 gives us another insight. For close to 60 years I have spent Sundays, structured around gathering in a local church with the congregation who called that building their spiritual home. We don't often talk about this simple reality: that Jesus did the same thing. The local synagogues in Israel in the time of Jesus, became the model for the experience of the church of Christ in terms of having a local place to meet. A chapel. A church. Luke tells us it was Jesus' custom, on the Sabbath day to attend the service at the synagogue, and when possible, at the synagogue in his home town.

And you will recognize the focus of the worship that would occur there. The Scriptures would be read, Old Testament of course, and someone would teach, a lesson based on the word that had been read. As I said, the synagogue

pattern of the Jews' religious life, spawned the church's pattern of worship in the Christian circle. A house of worship was a house of prayer. And the major time in worship was given to the reading and teaching that emerged from the Biblical word. On this particular Saturday, (Sabbath) Jesus was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He read from what we would call, chapter 61:1-2. When HE had read the portion, HE handed the scroll back to the attendant. HE sat down. That does not mean HE was done. Interestingly, we expect the preacher to stand. In the synagogue in the time of Jesus, the preacher sat. That is why every eye was focused on Jesus. The gathering has heard about his ministry in Galilee, and yes the healings that have occurred. What would HE say to them, in this very special place?

They did not expect what came out of HIS mouth. "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." There is a stunned silence. HE has friends in this gathering. They know HIM. HE is the son of Joseph the carpenter. (Read that as construction worker.) In the ancient time, as in modern Israel, most buildings and homes are built of stone. There is a drastic shortage of wood. One of the realities of a country that is for the most part desert.

The radical thing that Jesus has just announced is this: HE has said, Isaiah 61:1-2 is fulfilled as you heard me read it. I am the ONE. I am the Messiah. Suddenly there is a babble of people asking questions. They remind themselves who Jesus is...a labourer! Who does HE think HE is? That is the

importance of Luke chapter 4. This early, in Luke's attempt to write an orderly account, meaning first things are first, and last things come much later, in the order in which they occurred, Luke tells us, Jesus told the congregation HE would have thought of as HIS home synagogue....HE is the Messiah. HE will bring good news to the poor, set prisoners free, HE will proclaim sight to the blind, (what an interesting description of what we call a spectacular miracle of healing), HE will release the oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord!

There are two hard realities here. The first is hard in the sense of substantial, hard like rock. I stumbled and fell at the farmhouse while gathering up some wood. No great damage, but because I fell on hard stuff, I skinned my right knee. Undeniable that the ground was harder than my skin, or my flesh. Jesus said, I know who I am. "This prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled today, as you listen and hear my voice." You cannot deny it. Jesus said it. HE said it at the beginning of his public ministry. This is who I am. You would like to see, what you heard I did in Capernaum. Prophets are not welcome in their home towns. They aren't recognized by congregations in whose midst they grew up. They grabbed HIM. They took HIM to the edge of the cliff. Their intention was to throw him off. That is the second hard reality. Hard to grasp. They rejected his claim, to be the Messiah. They wanted to kill HIM. Why didn't they?

It is hard to explain. What Luke tells us is this: at the edge of the cliff, Jesus simply turned, and walked through the crowd. And HE went on HIS way. They seized HIM

and took HIM to the brink of the cliff, and then they had no power at all to do what they wanted to do. And Jesus did not run away, HE walked. HE walked through them, and continued the journey that would lead HIM to Calvary. HE taught. HE healed. HE set people free. HE gave sight to the blind. HE released the oppressed. HE proclaimed the year of the Lord! HE died. And three days later HE rose from the dead. HE influences more lives today, than HE did back then. Because HE is the Messiah. God's Son. The HOLY ONE.

A hard reality, is one that has substance. Because it has substance you should take it seriously. Because it has substance, it changes things. It changes you. It changed me too. Jesus Christ is Lord! HE claimed my life and that is why I bring this message to you and continually seek to share what the Gospel reveals. I testify that HE set this prisoner free. HE opened my denying eyes. There is more than one kind of blindness. HE released me from the oppression in which I was caught up and bound. HE loved me and HE loves me. HE changes everything. Praise be to God.

Let us pray;

Lord we weep for those who deny you. They do not know what they are missing. We rejoice for those with whom we have the privilege of sharing the life of faith. Forgive us when we speak amiss or go astray and help us to find our way back to the straight path, that leads to YOU and YOUR kingdom. We pray for those who are sick. Release your healing power Lord my God. Transform tears to laughter. Break the bonds that

make prisoners of YOUR children. Be with us. In Jesus name,
that we might be a blessing to those whom we meet, and
among whom we walk. Amen