

What Are You Being Prepared for? (Luke 4:14-30)

Today's passage from Luke is short enough that we can do a group Bible study of its verses. If you wish, you may turn to this passage on page 57-58 in the New Testament section of your pew Bible.

*When Jesus came to Nazareth,
where he had been brought up,
he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day,
as was his custom.*

This tells us that Jesus was a practicing Jew, living in the north of Israel, an area we know as Galilee—fertile cropland—a fishing region—crossroads of a major trade route. There—3,000,000 people lived.

He attended a synagogue in the village of Nazareth!

It's Friday night.

The Jewish Sabbath begins at night, by tradition, when three stars become visible in the sky.

This comes from the Jewish Torah, which, in the Book of Genesis, describes creation's unfolding—each day—in these words, "*And there was evening, and there was morning, one day.*"

Won't the world look different when you think of the day starting when three stars appear in the sky?

He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

Jesus wasn't always some amazing new phenomenon everywhere he went.

Jesus was a familiar face! A regular.

He had been going to the same synagogue in Nazareth for 30 years. Everyone in town knew him.

It was his turn to read, in this case from the Prophets, although there would also have been a reading from the Torah that night.

Did you know that the Bible is actually a library of many books—which existed as separate scrolls across centuries—and as oral tradition before that?—**then** was compiled into one book that Jews call The Tanakh, and we call The Holy Bible.

For Jews, the center of the Tanakh is the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy).

Torah means “Instruction”.

For Christians, the center of the Bible is The Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.....Gospel means “Message”.

You see the different concept of the meaning of the holy writings in Judaism and Christianity?

One is instruction. The other is message.

In Luke’s **message**, the emphasis is on Jesus reading from the Prophets— in Hebrew—the *Neviim*

‘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.’

We discussed Isaiah’s message last week.

It is a message to all who are NOT FREE in that their legal rights are restricted or non-existent.

Think LGBTQ persons in Missouri.
 Poor people with no right to medical care in Kansas.
 All kinds of working people robbed of their pensions!

Isaiah's message is to all who are not favored and actually are oppressed by the powerful and the privileged.

All who feel unforgiven in their personal and social relationships.

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?'

Notice three things:

First, he gives the scroll back to a synagogue official. This is the Chazzan. The chazzan had several duties:

Take out and put back the sacred scrolls.
 Keep the synagogue clean.
 Announce the coming of the Sabbath with 3 blasts of the silver trumpet.
 Be the teacher in the village school.

Secondly, the people listening to Jesus read were excited.

*"My, those are beautiful words he has spoken."
 What a fine selection."*

They knew this Jesus, and were glad he read so well.

Then notice that after giving the scroll to the Chazzan, Jesus sat down. Rabbis sat when they were teaching.

Jesus was just getting started on the commentary.
The interpretation, where you search the meaning....the value.

(He said to them, ‘Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, “Doctor, cure yourself!” And you will say, “Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.” ’ And he said, ‘Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s home town.

He was saying something like this: *Oh, you’re telling me that I’ve done some remarkable things in the next town, Capernaum; now you expect me to do the same kinds of things—maybe a miracle or two, here in Nazareth. Well, I’m sorry. I can’t do it. Everything is too routine around here. You may be faithful, but you have no motivation to change.*

And he goes on to draw on some of the oldest stories in the Jewish faith, stories they knew well.

But the way he told them—made them very, very **angry!**

But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.’ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.

Three years and six months with no rain!—is a way of saying: “Things were really bad! Things were 3 ½ times worse than they usually were!

Like the polar vortex that struck this week. 3 ½ times worse than usual!

In Daniel and Revelation, there's a reference to "A time, and times, and half a time."

Three and one half years, a time and times and a half a time—was a poetic symbol for evil and distress!.....It was a desperate situation!

And in this desperate situation—and also in the other desperate situation— where Naaman the Syrian general was the only person healed amidst an epidemic of leprosy—**Israel's prophets took care of people outside their faith! Foreigners! Even a foreign soldier.**

Jesus was putting the people of Nazareth in the same category as people who had not listened to Elijah and Elisha.

They may have liked his speaking style, his reading ability and his storytelling, but they did want to go back to the prophets' warnings or the prophets promises. At some point, a virtual riot broke out!

But Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on his way.....A strange ending?

Or a warning that if we aren't paying attention, Jesus could pass through the midst of us and go away?

The common focus on this passage is summed up in its traditional title:
The Rejection at Nazareth!

But I think there is more than that?

What if, instead, it were titled ***The Preparation of Jesus?***

Jesus was being prepared for hard work.

God was preparing Jesus for hard work.

God was preparing Jesus for **hard inner work** with himself and the non-physical, spiritual world!

And God was preparing him for **hard outer work** with people and their situations!

What if that is how **we** start looking at **our** troubles and trials and frustrations and even failures.

What if, instead of complaining about them, regretting them and wondering, “Why me?”

We instead prayed inwardly, “Why **not** me?”....Why not you?

God must be preparing **me** for something!

God must be preparing **you** for something!

God must be preparing **us** for something—that God needs us to do, that God needs us to become. Or to think! To imagine! To create!

By our defeats, God, may we become humble.

By our frustrated purposes, God, may we become patient—with ourselves & others.

By our sorrows, we may learn to comfort.

By our mistakes, we may become forgiving.

By our weaknesses, may You prepare us to be strong. Amen.

AMEN. Rev. Scott Myers Feb. 3, 2019
Westport Presbyterian Church
Season of Epiphany