

3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Luke 4:14-21

Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

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

"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."

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."

—

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of your hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer – *Amen*

It's a silly question to ask if you've ever had dreams – everyone has had a dream at some point! Dreams are, after all, part of the human experience. When I was young, many of my dreams often looked like "Star Trek," and when I got a little older they seemed to take on a different tone and form. Think about your dreams for a minute – then focus on how startling it was when they came true.

I know – when they came true. And I don't mean a Disney movie moment with loud trumpets and balloons. maybe the dreams didn't look quite like you imagined them. (I never got my Star Trek dreams – at least nothing that looked like them!)

This is what we are seeing in today's Gospel. Isaiah, through Scripture, spoke the dreams of the people of Israel. They dreamt of the Messiah for generations. Scripture spoke to their hearts and offered words for what they could only dream. "He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor – he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives - recovery of sight to the blind - to let the oppressed go free – and to have a year of the Lords favor." This is not a bad dream, really, good news for the poor, (they can always use some good news!). release to the

captives, (freedom is a good dream), recovery of sight to the blind, (what news could be better) to let the oppressed go free, (freedom again – I’m detecting a theme here), and a full year of the Lords favor. What a great dream!

But then Jesus gets unexpectedly bold – “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”. Today? Does he mean HIM? How can he claim that? Can it be true? Imagine the audacity of someone saying your dreams were coming true – not just yours, but the dreams of everyone around you! Think about it, Jesus was raised a Jew, so this Scripture, these dreams, would have been part of his make-up, too.

This was a big one for the people of Israel – they were occupied, they were poor and oppressed, and my guess would be turned to this ideal offered by Isaiah for comfort in times of stress, taking comfort in the words that they would one day be free, they would one day no longer poor. They would one day be no longer oppressed, and rather that feeling forgotten by the Lord, they would live for a year in the Lords favor! And now this one man was saying todays the day? Imaging believing in something your whole life and hearing those words “this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” What do you do? Do you believe it, even if it doesn’t look like you imagined? Has the dream come true?

As this passage continues beyond today reading, Luke offers the people reacting saying “All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked”, perhaps I imagine with a touch of shock and confusion in their tone. This passage is considered by many biblical scholars to be the beginning of Jesus’ Galilean ministry – he has offered who he is to the people.

But Jesus, after this initial reception, seems to go on to rile the crowd up offering, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown.” Jesus goes on to make a number of statements that seem to dismiss Scripture, leading to a reaction described this way, “All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.”

So the fulfilment of the dream does not look like they had imagined all that time. We have the advantage of a broader vision – we know what happens in the story, and how Jesus goes on to be as Isaiah described – but in context, the people do not know this. Their beliefs have been challenged by one who claims to be what they have sought and dreamt of for years.

In today’s reading from Corinthians we are offered “Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.”

Our dreams are part of who we are, too. “Not any less part of the body”, they affect who we are day to day. Perhaps not with the same prophetic impact we hear today! The dreams of Isaiah words in Scripture made the people who they were. The dreams were important. Many of the dreams and visions recorded in the Bible were considered prophetic, so dreams were considered important and not to be dismissed.

Today dreamers are often considered flighty and hard to pin down. When you are “daydreaming” you are just not paying attention. In the context of today’s reading, though, dreamers were not considered weak or distant. Dreams were to be respected. Corinthians again, offers, “our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” So leave space for the dreams and for the dreamers.

Christ often spoke prophetically. Do you think Christ had dreams? In Philippians it is offered “but God emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.” And I said at the beginning that having dreams is part of the human experience. What would God, living in the world in the form of Jesus, have dreamed?

Another look at today’s reading of Corinthians offers “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” If we, all of us together, are the body of Christ, we, all together, are part of that dream. Its not something we wait for someone else to do. We work according to our strengths, because we, together, can bring good news to the poor – we together can proclaim release to the captives, we together, as the body of Christ, can help the oppressed to freedom, help the blind, and go forward into time in the Lords favor.

The dream may just not look like we imagined.

Amen