

Sermon / 23 January 2022 / Luke 4:14-21, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 / Fulfilled

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Today the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Today, right now, while you were listening to a scripture lesson from the Bible, it happened.

Today, the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

That's what Jesus just said in today's Gospel.

In today's story from Luke, Jesus goes home to Nazareth. He attends the Sabbath service at the synagogue. He is given a passage to read. He reads, sits down to preach and begins by saying.

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus had just read these words from the prophet Isaiah:

*"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 then Jesus said:

Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

We understand this passage to mean that Jesus was talking about himself.

Jesus was saying the spirit of the Lord was upon HIM.

HE was the one anointed by God.

HE had been sent to release the captive.

HE was going to give sight to the blind and let the oppressed go free.

This scripture was about HIM – here he was. So, that day the scripture had been fulfilled in the listeners' hearing.

But what if Jesus has showed up on a different Sabbath? What if the scripture had been different than that passage from Isaiah? The Torah is read in order – much like our lectionary which prescribes a different reading for each week.

What if Jesus had read a different lesson on a different day?

Would he have said the same thing when he finished? Would he have told those listening that the scripture had been fulfilled in their hearing?

I'd like to think so.

Here's an idea for us. What if each week WE said "Today the scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing?"

No matter what passage is read. No matter what Sunday it is. No matter who reads the lesson.

What if...at the end of each scripture reading – instead of the reader saying "The Word of the Lord" and "Thanks be to God." – what if, instead, we said "Today, the scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing." ... "Thanks be to God."

What would that mean?

What if each time we heard a reading from the Bible – a reading of Good News – what if we just proclaimed that scripture had been fulfilled right then and there?

Wouldn't that be amazing? Because, really, let's face it, isn't that what we're here for? To bring the kingdom of God right here on earth? To fulfill the words of God?

What if, just like Jesus, we read the word of God, and then told everyone that those words had been fulfilled.

Doesn't that sound fantastic?

For instance, Maren read from the prophet Nehemiah: *"Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared."*

And then, right there at the end, what if she had said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing."

.... "Thanks be to God."

And Richard read from Paul's letter to the Corinthians this morning. He read these words:

"For we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

If one member of the body suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

And then, what if he had said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing.” “Thanks be to God.”

What a blessing it would be if just by someone reading the scriptures aloud.... just by all the rest of us listening to those words and understanding that sacred text.... just by the mere pronouncement of the Good News.... the scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing.

But what if that scripture hasn't yet been fulfilled. What if by reading and listening and understanding and waiting for all that Good News in the scripture *HASN'T* yet been fulfilled in our hearing?

A-ha! That's the problem isn't it. Fulfillment takes some action.

From Nehemiah: There are people who do not have food and wine prepared for them who are waiting for someone to share what they have.

From Paul's letter: We do not always behave as if we are all one body in Christ. We do not all suffer when one body part suffers. We do not all rejoice when one part of the body honored. We do not all care for one another. Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, people of different types are NOT all treated with the same respect and dignity.

From Luke: the poor often don't get good news. There are still captives and oppressed people waiting to be set free. There are still people who are left in the dark waiting for the light.

I propose that every time we hear a portion of scripture or read it aloud to others or study it alone in the quiet of our hearts, we conclude by saying the word: “Today this scripture WILL BE fulfilled WITH our hearing.”

And then we go out into the world to make that happen. Let us vow to fulfill that scripture we have just heard.

In today's Gospel, Jesus told the assembled crowd in his hometown synagogue what he had been sent to do – what he intended to do. In next week's Gospel we hear the conclusion of this story – and those gathered to listen to the scripture being fulfilled aren't all that happy about it. Jesus is run out of town. And we know how his ministry ends. Jesus is not able complete the transformation of this world. He dies for our sins and calls us to continue his mission on earth.

Clearly fulfilling the Good News of the word of God takes some time. It takes perseverance and courage and strength and commitment and sacrifice. But we can never give up.

The scripture may not be fulfilled today in our hearing. But we are called to fulfill it. To make it happen. To never give up.

My husband and I – baby boomers – never dreamed that we would one day be able to get legally married. But it did happen and we will celebrate our 9th wedding anniversary this year.

I knew I was called to ordained ministry back in the early 1980's. But it would have been so difficult to follow that path as a gay man back then. But here I stand today – proud to serve you and the church I love as clergy person.

Through hard work and determination dreams and scriptures *ARE* fulfilled. Things do change. Things do get better. They never happen as fast as we want them to or as fast as we think they should. But change *DOES* happen.

Scripture being fulfilled does happen.

But we must work toward fulfilling the scriptures. We are called to spread the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ and MAKE IT HAPPEN. FULFILL IT!

We are not called to complain or pontificate or give our totally unwanted opinions about anything. We are called to make things happen.

Nehemiah: Let's go out there and make sure everyone has the food and drink they need and deserve.

Paul: Let's go out there and make sure all parts of the body of Christ are treated equally with the respect they deserve.

Luke: Let's follow up on Jesus' promise and set captives free, help people see, and bring good news to the poor.

Today, the scripture will be fulfilled with our hearing.

And I can't wait for us to read other passages from the Bible together:

Blessed are the meek – will be fulfilled.

All things are made new – will be fulfilled.

You are the light of the world – will be fulfilled.

I was a stranger and you welcomed me – will be fulfilled.

The lost and reckless offspring is welcomed home – will be fulfilled.

Love one another as Jesus loves us – will be fulfilled.

Some days the scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing.

Some days it is up to us to hear the scripture and then work to fulfill it.

So, listen up! Today these scriptures will be fulfilled – **BY US** – with our hearing.

Thanks be to God!