

# “It’s Been Fulfilled, Today”

At 10 a.m. on January 23, 2022  
York United Ministries  
Virtual Worship hosted by York Pines United Church  
Rev. Andrew K. Lee

## **Prayer for Illumination**

Just as we see your wisdom and glory in nature around us, God, may we hear your Word for us in the words of these readings, that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may be drawn closer to you. Through your great preacher, Jesus Christ, we pray. **Amen.**

## **Scripture Reading**                      Luke 4:14-21

<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup> He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

<sup>16</sup> 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, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup> “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,

<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

This is the word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## <Reflection>

Good morning everyone! May the grace of Jesus Christ be with you, and I hope you are inspired through the worship service, especially through the Word of God. Today I brought a passage from Luke, according to the Lectionary we are using. The scene in the passage is about Jesus' teaching in a synagogue. As we read, Jesus returned to Galilee and started his teaching ministry. When he arrived at Nazareth, where he had spent his childhood, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He read Isaiah chapter 61:1-2a and preached. In order to understand this passage, we need to apprehend the position of this passage.

It says that Jesus returned to Galilee, went to Nazareth, went to the synagogue in the town, and returned to Galilee again. His move could be one of the keys to understanding this passage. First, Jesus returned to Galilee. From where? Where was he before turning back to Galilee? He was in the wilderness for forty days of spiritual exercise with fast. Then, when defeating the three well-known temptations, being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, he started his teaching ministry. His teaching promptly made him famous and influential, and people who listened to him were satisfied and filled with joy. His teaching settings were sometimes on the street, on a field, or in religious institutions,

such as a synagogue. People gathered in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as we gathered in a sanctuary for worship on Sunday. Like modern Christians, Jewish tradition also had its own order of worship. When they enter the synagogue, they pray their individual prayer. Then all of the congregation recites the Word of God, particularly known as Shema, in Deuteronomy chapter 6 and chapter 12.<sup>1</sup> After reciting Shema, they pray specific written prayers, named Tephillah<sup>2</sup> and Shemoneh Esrei, a.k.a the Eighteen Blessings. And Scripture reading follows. Subsequently, the worship includes a sermon. Lastly, the worshippers recite a prayer of praising God, called Kaddish<sup>3</sup>, so the order of worship was simple: Individual prayer, Shema. Tephilla, Shemoneh Esrei, Scripture reading, sermon, and Kaddish.

In the passage today, we can know that Jesus was invited to read the Scripture and do a sermon on that day. So he walked to the pulpit and read what he found. We could be misled when we don't fully pay attention. It says in verse 17 the scroll of the prophet Isaiah *was given to him*. It sounds like he was asked to read Isaiah. Actually, it is not. He must've intentionally asked for the scroll in advance because he found Isaiah 61:1-2a. The Greek

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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21.

<sup>2</sup> תפילה

<sup>3</sup> קדיש

Bible employs a verb in this sentence that means he intentionally found it.<sup>4</sup> His choice of reading was not accidental. Jesus presents these verses from the Book of Isaiah 61 as a description of who he is and what his ministry is about. To bring good news to the poor. To proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, which is the year of Jubilee. These are about forgiveness, recovery, and healing. And these certainly are his declaration of the purpose for his ministry just before doing his miraculous works. So far, so good and so familiar to us. People with Jesus at the synagogou may have also felt the same because they already knew the Book of Isaiah.

Now, after his reading, people were waiting for his sermon. All eyes were fixed on Jesus. He paused a moment and did his speech: "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The first sentence of the sermon struck the congregation. The rest of the sermon was not written in the Gospel of Luke. However, Jesus had to leave Nazareth and return to his base camp, Galilee after this preaching. Why? Because the people in Nazareth were trying to grab and kill Jesus . Why? Because they were really furious. Why? What was wrong? What made them so annoyed?

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<sup>4</sup> εὗρεν

They were concerned about the contents of Jesus' words. In what sense? All he did was read Isaiah, which cannot be wrong, and one sentence: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Which part do you think triggered their temper? "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Many things can be pointed out. Actually, I wish I could elaborate on the quotations from the Book of Isaiah; however, I must primarily focus on the first word of Jesus' sermon: "today." The Jews knew the Prophet Isaiah's words, and they were waiting for the Messiah who fulfills the proclamation in the future. They thought the nation that the Messiah would rule couldn't be compared to their current miserable colonial life under the Roman Empire. And they thought this countryman couldn't be the Messiah because they had known him since he was a baby. His words were such blasphemy. For the Jews, "today" couldn't be the day that Isaiah's words were achieved. I don't think anyone would've understood Jesus' word at the moment. Even the disciples.

Let's suppose Jesus came to us today and declared the same words: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." We wouldn't try to kill him but would express our opinion.

“Objection, sir! This can’t be true. The economy is going down, the COVID variant is sweeping the world, and rumours of war are being reported. This world is such a disaster right now, and the vision of Isaiah can’t be fulfilled TODAY! Please, Lord! It’s going to be safer to say that the vision WAS given, and it WILL be fulfilled in the FUTURE.” Does it sound OK if modern preachers speak out, saying, “The divine vision was given to our ancestors, and it will be achieved throughout human history. Our descendants will see the fulfillment of God’s vision!” What do you think? Sounds good?

No! For Jesus, it didn’t sound right. And his stance is so consistent in his ministry. People can easily be trapped in the words of the past and the future while forgetting the importance of the present. Older generations, including myself, witnessed the booming of Christianity. So we feel very painful to see the dwindling church today. “Churches in North America did a great job in the 1960s. We experienced amazing things at church in the 1970s!” Yes, right. I know that, and I was there too. It is important to remember and celebrate what we’ve done in the past. However, if we overemphasize or romanticize our past, saying our best days are behind us, and at the same time, if we complain about our present hardships and push today’s burdens to an unknown

time in the future, then our present would disappear, and today will only be filled with doubts and anxieties.

The Jews who gathered at the synagogue in Nazareth were the same: They only had the glorious words of Isaiah, romanticizing the word of their ancestors. Their glorious future will come with the Messiah, but it shouldn't happen to their generation; the divine vision should be fulfilled someday, far, far away from now. Therefore, their "today" was just pain in-between the glorious past and a future of "I don't know, I don't care."

But look at Jesus and his teaching. He is saying that the great promises are achieved today, not tomorrow. When Jesus uses the word "today," it has multiple layers. When it comes to "today," it means the unlimited time frame of "here and now," not a specific limited time and date, like Jan 23rd, 2022. For Jesus, today is the period of time that humans and God are being involved. And Jesus' usages of the word today and the understanding of present time for the Kingdom of God are consistent. Jesus didn't merely flatter the past glory. Jesus wasn't dependent on his future generations to take care of everything he had to endure.

Sisters and brothers, God called you as Christians. And God will glorify you and sanctify you through Jesus Christ. And yet, we must always recall that God wants us to respond to and accomplish the divine vision today, here and now. Therefore, like Jesus Christ, our exemplar, let's declare God's vision today. Let's proclaim that the vision is fulfilled today to you, to your spouse, to your descendants, to your friends and to your neighbours. And let's act on at least one thing; several things, if possible. Then the divine vision will be fulfilled to you today.

Let us pray: O God, rekindle our hearts. As Jesus was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, pour your Spirit upon us and let us live out your words today, proclaiming your vision through us. Give us no other day than today to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and new beginnings to all who failed. Draw us close to you, be with us, and reside within us so that we can boldly fulfill your calling today. Amen.