

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Third Sunday after the Epiphany – January 23, 2022

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21)

We go to church and pray for God to come among us, speak to us and to reveal God’s will for us. Do we expect God to answer our prayers? And what if God did? What if God actually gave us what we asked? What would we do with that?

Jesus returns to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. They hand the hometown boy, the young rabbi, the scroll of the prophet Isaiah to read. These were hopeful words that kept God’s people together through centuries of persecution. They would say, “Today we’re having a tough time. But tomorrow there will be good news. God is coming to help the poor, release the prisoners, give the blind their sight, liberate those who are oppressed. Today we are powerless and burdened, but our day will come when God sets things right.”

Jesus said that the day of the Lord is now. “The kingdom of God has come near,” Jesus said. Things went okay as he read the poetic words of Isaiah in the synagogue. Then Jesus had the gall to announce, “Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,” and the people completely lost it. Things got ugly and the congregation was filled with wrath (vs.28). It was being so near, so NOW, that caused the crisis.

Jesus’s incarnation was not only in flesh but also in time. When our time is commandeered by God and what was only a distant expectation — a vague hope — becomes real, present, now ... we get nervous and our defenses against God shift into high gear.

Is Jesus Christ only someone you have heard of who lived two thousand years ago? If yes, no need to be threatened by Jesus because he is so far removed from time. This is a defense against Jesus because we think he is unrelated to our time.

There’s a huge difference between a preacher saying, “Once upon a time, Jesus said...” and a preacher saying, “Jesus Christ says to you now, today...” It’s one thing to hear Jesus say, “One day, someday, I’ll be there for you,” and another to hear Jesus say, “Now, today, come to me. Now.”

What will you do when Jesus ends a sermon by saying to you, “Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”?

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