

SERMON: *"Was praised by everyone."*

Rev. Geoff Ross, Sunday, January 23, 2022, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Epiphany as a time of revelation – of insight. Coming from the Greek word "*epiphaniein*" meaning "*reveal*" Epiphany is the season when we celebrate the manifestation – the appearance/materialization-into physical form/sign of Christ/God's presence to the world. His coming to be-with us/to live-as us in bodily/physical/human form was to reveal/make known/bring to light God's plan/purpose for Creation/world/us/you/me that had been obscured by the veil of the fall/sin/death. Like the Christ candle that we light, Jesus came into our world to reveal what we've forgotten/remove the scale from our eyes/show us the way back to God/our created/called/commissioned life; and He did this in all He said/did – right from the start of His ministry. Jesus didn't come to talk about God's kingdom; He came to live it out by walking the talk. And He wants us/you/me to live/be/act out as what He modelled for us: how to be His Body in/to the world as the Church.

While, in the arc of God's saving plan for His Creation, Jesus came to be-with us/was born to die-for us; this was the last act of His mission: According to His own words, He was not born to die: He was born to save/free/liberate in this world/life. But He knew that this message would challenge the 'ways of this world' – and us/our faith/lives. This is what the passage we have from the Book of Nehemiah tells us: Jesus/God was reminds them/us of who/whose they were/what they/we were created to be/do. God created us with a plan/purpose/calling – and through the Bible/our lives God reminds us of this when we stray/deviate from the path/plan, calling us back into community/for the common good. In today's epistle passage Paul depicts this "*common good*" with the metaphor of a body with individual parts, in community/differing gifts coming together in different ways for the common good/contribute to the body as a whole.

This is what Jesus is doing at the synagogue in the Luke reading: By showing/standing up/forward and declared the truth about His life in the midst of His earthly community, Jesus both told/warned those listening – especially those who were only faithful in their talk – that He was filled with the Spirit/anointed/sent to bring good news to the poor – that starting today/here/now the time had come/God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven! This announcement reveals both the nature of Jesus' ministry – and the character/nature of the Church that will rise/follow from His ministry. Seen this way, Jesus' act of reading/claiming Isaiah's prophecy, is not only a life-changing act, it's a world-changing act.

Luke's account of Jesus' public ministry begins with a brief mention that Jesus taught in synagogues, and "*was praised by everyone*" – meaning that His message was exciting those who heard it! But it isn't until He comes to Nazareth – His 'hometown' – and He attends/teaches at His 'home' synagogue, that we hear His message: That He came/is here "*to bring good news to the poor,*" "*proclaim release to the captives,*" "*recovery of sight to the blind,*" "*let the oppressed go free;*" and "*proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" Interestingly, Luke makes this moment the beginning of Jesus' ministry in order to prioritize/emphasize Jesus' Messianic/divine plan/purpose within the community/synagogue/Church – but, if need be – against it: He's not here to be praised by everyone! He's doing it because it's important – then/there, here/now – that it is within this community context: Jesus delivers his mission/purpose announcement, naming the origins/goals of

His ministry/claiming His role/authority in the midst of/for the community of faith/God's Body – His Body, the Church.

Luke uses the Nazareth visit for Jesus to announce who He is/what His ministry will be, and what his Church will be/do. Using Isaiah's words, Jesus announces that He embodied/incarnated/was to live out this ministry because "*the Spirit of the Lord*" is upon Him/God "*has anointed*" Him/God "*has sent*" Him. By doing this, Luke/Jesus make it clear that this work is not His/Jesus' own, but is God's; Jesus is God's agent/servant/Son to "*do/fulfill*" what God has promised will be done – modelling for us how we are to use or gifts to cooperate/collaborate/coordinated-action with God to fulfill God's will. Again, by doing this, Jesus was not just claiming something about Himself, but this time He was pronouncing something about each of us: We were created to live out/fulfill our divine purpose/calling – as God's creation/the Church/the Body of Christ.

Finally, by saying that all this has been "*fulfilled in their/our hearing,*" Jesus invites us to follow Him – but He makes it clear that following this Jesus means accepting His mission/call on you/me/us: As His followers, we can follow Him/fulfill our created calling by choosing – as individuals/congregation – to embody God's will/be the Body of Christ here/today, living out "*what*" Jesus did, "*how*" He did it. What would change in our lives/congregation if, like Jesus, we stood, with confidence/boldly/filled by the Spirit, declared; "*Today, God has revealed to us that we are to bringing good news to the poor/release to the captives/recovery of sight to the blind/let the oppressed go free – and proclaim the year of the Lord's favour!*" Not to be praised by everyone, but to know the "great reward" of God's joy. Amen