

January 27, 2019

Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church

I Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21

### **When Does the Worship Service End?**

We're in a worship service. Here, right now. But also in today's gospel story, from Luke 4. We're in a worship service, and so is Jesus, and he stands up, finds the scripture passage, and reads. Jesus was the lector that day. We always have a lector, too, here in our worship services. So you know who it is, their name is listed in the back of the bulletin. You can check it, I do. As worship begins I often scan of the pews, "Do we have a lector today? There they are, good." Then, as worship continues, at the appointed time the lector comes up and stands behind the lectern, that thing over there, it's designed to hold a book, or a paper, from which the lector reads. Holly Van Essen was our lector today. You might already know her name without looking at the back of the bulletin. Holly's known around here, she's lived in Irving Park for a number of years. It's not her hometown, but she brought up her children here. You'll often find Holly in worship here, it's her custom. And sometimes she's the lector. Like today. At the appointed time, she stood up, walked over to the lectern, found the place in the bulletin where the scripture readings were, read them, and then sat down.

Just like Jesus did in from Luke 4. Holly didn't read that, though, because the final Bible reading in worship, the gospel reading, isn't done from the lectern. The gospel is read from there, in the middle aisle, in the midst of everybody, the crowd of humanity gathered here. We do that in worship because that's what the gospel does: The gospel is the word of God, God's very being, right in our midst, Jesus. Jesus is with us in worship, right now.

Jesus was in worship on that day described in Luke 4. Jesus had been traveling, all around Galilee, and then he came to his hometown, Nazareth, the place where his parents raised him. That's how he got his nickname, "Jesus of Nazareth." That's how people knew him, and they also knew that if it was a Sabbath, you could find him in worship, that was his custom, on weeks he wasn't traveling, he went to worship. Sometimes, he was the lector.

He was the lector that day. At the appointed time he stood up, found the place where the readings were—instead of a bulletin, he had a scroll. Bulletins hadn't been invented yet. Neither had the New Testament. Or books. Before that there were scrolls. Jesus' Bible was a scroll. Jesus' Bible was the Jewish Bible, the law and the prophets and the writings, what Christians today call the Old Testament. And Jesus knew it well. And he could have read from any number of its books. He could have read from the book of Nehemiah, like Holly did today. Or he could have read a psalm, we also had a psalm today. But Jesus would probably have sung a psalm, like we did, because that's what you do with psalms, that's what they are, they're songs. Jesus sometimes sang psalms. He sang a psalm with his disciples after the last supper. Before going to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus and his disciples sang a psalm, the Bible says. Which psalm we don't know. But we do know which psalm Jesus sang, all by himself, not very long after that, a psalm that he sang, from the cross. We know which psalm it was that Jesus sang, while hanging there, in the midst of humanity, from the depths of despair, at the center of the worst that human life can do and be. From the cross, Jesus sang Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why?"

Jesus knew the scripture. Jesus knew what it was to experience it, to embody it, to fulfill it. Jesus knew the suffering servant songs, found in Isaiah; Jesus knew other parts of Isaiah, too, including the ones that he turned to on that day that is described in Luke 4. On that day, Jesus turned to the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and he read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to bring good news." And then Jesus put the scroll back, and sat down.

And then he began to speak, to say to them, to interpret the reading. Jesus wasn't only the lector, he was also the preacher that day, Jesus preached his first sermon that day, that's what Luke

4 is. You may miss this, at first, because it's only a one line sermon, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Actually it's a longer sermon that that, we had only its beginning today, we'll hear more of it next week. It also might not sound like a sermon, because it doesn't mention Jesus climbing up into the pulpit. Instead, it says that he sat down. Which might sound odd to us but actually was the custom, back then. Officials gave announcements, teachers taught, philosophers philosophied, while seated. You can see this in another sermon Jesus gives, the Sermon on the Mount. Before Jesus begins that sermon, the Bible says he sits down. And then he begins to teach them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." So also with the sermon we hear the beginning of, today. First Jesus sits down, and then he says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

This is scandalous stuff, this sermon intro, and it will get yet more scandalous as the sermon continues. Jesus, the kid who grew up in their midst, saying the Spirit of the Lord is upon him! A hometown boy, saying he's the fulfillment of holy writ! Somebody everyone knows, saying he's the anointed one, there to proclaim release from captivity, and sight for the blind, and freedom from oppression, and favor. Jesus announces all of that. Jesus has the audacity to announce God's good news, from his very being, in his very being, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

It scandalizes those who hear it. If you keep reading past where today's gospel passage ends, when Jesus finishes his sermon the people gathered in worship become a mob that chases him out of town, wants to throw him off a cliff. But Jesus passes through the midst of them, the Bible tells us. Jesus makes his way through the crowd and continues on his way. Another cliff is still ahead of him, the cliff that is the cross. That's where he'll be found, on another day, in the midst of another crowd, who is hurling curses at him, as he hangs between criminals. This is not customary, that one would find God in a place of such derision. This is not customary, that God would deign to suffering and pain. Still, from the cross, Jesus continues to preach, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And he continues to preach—and you can hear echoes of his first sermon here, "Today you will be with me in paradise." "Today the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus kept preaching, on the cross, and through the grave. Jesus continued preaching to the captives imprisoned in hell, "Today you are released. Today you will be with me in paradise." Jesus kept preaching on the road to Emmaus, and to a room of frightened disciples, Jesus continued preaching.

Any sermon ever preached, if it's worthy of the name, continues. It may have a conclusion, but a sermon doesn't end, not in worship, not if it's preaching the gospel. What is heard on Sunday continues on Monday, and Tuesday, and Wednesday, and Thursday, when the good news of God takes flesh in people's lives. The sermon continues when we forgive one another, and see the favor of God in one another; when we work for release for all who are trapped in any kind prison, and sight for all who are engulfed in darkness; when we take hold of God's vision for a new tomorrow—today. We can take hold of that vision, today. Even if our hometown is Chicago, in January. Even when the windchill is below zero, and the days are dark. Even when all feels dark, when life is overwhelming, and your spirits are low, so very low. Even then, the Spirit of the Lord is upon you.

The scandal of incarnation continues, in us. Jesus has died and risen; we, now, are the body of Christ. All of us, together, weeping together, rejoicing together, all of us anointed with gifts of the Spirit, all of us appointed to put faith into action. It is like that poster, you may have seen it, that poster that says, "Believe there is good in the world." That's a tall order sometimes, but that's not all. Belief is important, but there's more to it than that, and that poster gets at that, in the way the words are arranged, and in the colors of the letters, so you can read it in two ways: "Believe there is good in the world," and "Be the good in the world." Be the body of Christ, because you are. Be the body of Christ, when worship ends, and the service begins.