

# Knowing Jesus In Epiphany – It Is Him!

Luke 4:14-21

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany

January 27, 2019

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## **Luke 4:14-21 (NRSV)**

### **The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry**

<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.

### **The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth**

<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.”

I remember a song from my childhood Sunday School and VBS, that the “B.I.B.L.E – oh that’s the book for me...” Do YOU remember that one? Depending on our backgrounds and traditions as we grew up, that little ditty might be familiar. Or really strange!

We probably ALL have different feelings about the “B.I.B.L.E”

I know some people whose relationship with the Bible is reverent – but remote...they read it for the “high” holidays like Christmas and Easter. (And I don’t mean to sound judgmental, but *that* might say a little about their record of attendance too.)

Some feel guilty that the “book” is gathering dust on their bookshelves, but they’re too *intimidated* to even open it.

And others, have a friend or family member who *discourages* them from reading the Bible because “it might ruin your faith.” Hmmm.

I still like the old acronym for B.I.B.L.E – “**B**asic **I**nstructions **B**efore **L**eaving **E**arth.”

If we’re really honest, and this WOULD be a good place to be that, we all have had some better times than others for reading our Bibles.

And we have to be careful. *If*, when we are consistent and diligent, we allow God’s word to become too-familiar we risk taking it for granted.

B.I.B.L.E.

Today’s lectionary readings, from the OT and from Luke, are both familiar-to-me-stories, and oh, so connected!

Don’t you love it when God stops us in our tracks and gets our attention?

And familiar, or not, both stories re-invigorated me about God’s Word.

I don’t know if they’ll do the same for you but, let’s take a look at some things I hope YOU find invigorating, too!

The OT Scripture (which we “hinted” at with our Call to Worship) is from the book of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah describes a beautiful and hard earned moment in Israel’s history.

Nehemiah is a minor figure in the court of Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, and when he hears that Jerusalem is defeated, burned up and destroyed, Nehemiah begs the king to let him return to his homeland and rebuild the city of his ancestors.

There were a lot of obstacles to the rebuilding of Jerusalem, but Nehemiah was persistent and FINALLY able to restore the city wall and gates.

And, when those projects are completed, Nehemiah invited the Hebrew people to return from exile to their capitol city.

Then he asks them to get together in the square at the Water Gate and it's there that another prophet, Ezra, "*opens the book in the sight of all people,*" and reads from the law of Moses "*from early morning until midday.*"

Ezra puts in a filibuster of reading until the people gathered in the square open their ears, understand, raise their hands, worship "with their faces to the ground," say, "Amen, Amen," and weep as they hear the words God has for them.

Then, they go to their homes and "*eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared,*" (it says) because "*the joy of the Lord is their strength.*"

What a scene!

It was an experience that brought a bunch of exiles together and as they **paid attention** came to *hear* with their hearts, I think, and comprehend enough to know that God was speaking to THEM and they worshiped!

How awesome is that!

I think I read the Bible a lot...and often...but when was the last time any of us read the Bible with THAT kind of attentiveness?

Or expectation?

I've never, ever, EVER seen THAT kind of response (sorry Jared) to the reading of God's word...*except IN God's Word!*

When was the last time any of us **savored** the sweetness OR the sorrow it contains?

When was the last time any of us **trusted** God's Word enough to see the very situations we're living in (past, present, or hoped in the future) and allowed that RECOGNITION bring us to our knees with relief and gratitude?

When was the last time WE allowed the BIBLE to pull us into a **community celebration**?

Something powerful and transforming happened when Ezra opened The Book (in his case it was a scroll.)

It's not magic or manipulation.

What happened is that the people came and listened to God's Word with their whole hearts, received what was read with vulnerability, and **THEN** expressed their understanding with celebration in worship AND sharing which surely brought MORE fellowship.

Can we even IMAGINE what would it be like come HERE and open our Bibles and experience THAT? Could we find that kind of joy here?

Our NT reading, that Jared read for us, takes place centuries later, in another podunk town (like Cana was last Sunday.) We're in Nazareth.

It's a Sabbath day and this scene takes place after Jesus's temptation in the wilderness (which is just after his baptism.)

Remember those events?

There was a voice from Heaven calling him "Beloved...."

...and the Spirit descending onto him....that same Spirit cared for him in the desert.

I believe that BOTH events gave Jesus a self-understanding of who and WHOSE he was but being THE SON of God or being TOUCHED BY THE SPIRIT won't make his ministry easy!

But, for today's reading, I think Jesus is now Spirit-empowered and he's got his mission in focus. He's ready to launch his ministry. And where better than to begin at home?

Jesus come to his hometown, Nazareth, where Joseph settled his young family after returning from **their** exile in Egypt.

Jesus enters the synagogue, (it says "filled with the power of the Spirit") where he has likely worshiped all his life, and he stands up (as is **the** custom to read Scripture) and reads.

It says he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

He unrolled it and found the place he wants and by the time he's finished reading (Luke tells us), every eye in the synagogue is fixed on him.

In Luke's gospel, THIS is the inaugural act of Jesus's ministry.  
And, we'll discuss this more NEXT Sunday, he's met with hostility.  
His teaching gets nods of praise but THIS?!

As he rolled that scroll back up he proclaimed:

- his identity,
- his purpose,
- and his vocation.

Jesus interprets the Spirit's (that is God's) action in his life and he believes himself to be COMMISSIONED to DO ministry that brings good news to the poor, liberates captives (to whatever they may be bound by) and restore sight to the blind.

He is claiming and **PROCLAIMING** *who he is – The Spirit-anointed, God-commissioned Messiah.*

And, what I get a kick out of about the scene is that Jesus chooses to reveal WHO HE IS and the MEANING of his life and WHAT his work will be through the beloved and well-worn words of Scripture.

These are words, that those folks at the synagogue that day have heard for generations. MANY times.

They'd know, by memory, what they were hearing.

But, had the words lost their power?

Had they been read and heard so many times that they'd become over-familiar?

Don't get me wrong, if the Son of God wanted to, he could have written a new mission statement.

He's THE Incarnate Word himself.

But no!

Jesus didn't improvise.

He opened the scroll and would make the old, traditional words his own.

*“God 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.”*

It's as if to say:

*The Word lives, here and now. It breathes, it moves in fresh and world-changing ways. And by the way, The Word of God isn't dull or dead. It is alive.*

We'll see next week, that of course, the people's response isn't like the one Ezra and Nehemiah saw and heard when Ezra finished reading.

In fact, we could say that Jesus's audience recoils in shock and outrage.

When he makes the words of Scripture his own they will (we'll hear) become downright hostile!

And yet, just for a moment, just before they get upset and militant and homicidal, for JUST a moment, when Jesus stands before them and reads to them, they WERE riveted.

They *should have been* joyful and shouted "IT'S HIM!"

John the Baptizer had proclaimed it, too!

If they'd have heard with their hearts and had their ears opened they would have heard (and seen standing right in front of them) The ONE they'd been waiting for SINCE Nehemiah's time!

Sure, the very next verse says "*all spoke well of him and were amazed at the words that came from his mouth.*"

Jeepers – they'd heard hope-inspiring words...that IF they'd listened and really heard, they'd have seen being fulfilled right in front of them!

How would we have heard?

Think about that for a bit.

Would Scripture have become too familiar to you that you couldn't see the Word's fulfillment?

...or IS the Bible fresh?

Or is it dull?

Do we read it and hear it and let it shape us?

Is it the place we go to, like Jesus did, to find our meaning and purpose and even our vocations?

This Epiphany, as we grow to KNOW JESUS more, don't let the Word – who is Jesus, John's gospel tells us, become too familiar.

Or the B.I.B.L.E feed apathy.

I'm challenging us all today, and for the days ahead, to "unroll the scroll!"

Open The Book and be like the returning exiles of Israel, hearing God's words AGAIN (and again) and receive it.

Read it and receive what God has to say to YOU. And me.

Find the "joy of the Lord" for our own good!

See, Jesus didn't fulfil his ministry all by himself. He called disciples to follow and work with him.

WE ARE JESUS' disciples called to participate in revealing God's kingdom; to be a part of the work that liberates captives, allows the blind to see, and the oppressed to be released.

We can do these things and then share God's abundance with others.

OUR worship can and will become a feast that includes those who are in need of being fed – not just for their tummies; but for their very lives.

Let's unroll the scroll and be joyful as it reveals WHO Jesus was and is and will be.

Amen?

Amen!