

Luke 4:14-21 ~ January 23rd, 2022

Call to Worship:

In mystery and grandeur, we encounter the God of all creation.

In renewed justice and the promise of new life, we know deep love of Christ.

In the wonderful diversity in every community, the Spirit of God moves among us.

Let us worship the God of beauty, love, and wisdom. We will praise God, ever Three and ever One, now and always.

Prayer of Approach and Confession:

Creator, Christ and Spirit;

You are the maker of a better world.

You are the creator of lasting peace.

We worship you for the gifts of peace and healing that

You bring into troubled lives.

You have shown us the way to work for justice,

to love friend and enemy alike,

to build a better world.

In this time of worship,

inspire us to believe our work in your name makes a difference.

So may we live to bring glory to you through our commitment to you

and the communion we share with so many around world

as your faithful disciples.

God of grace and unity,

we confess we can be divisive when you have called us to unity,

quarrelsome when you call us to seek peace, and

critical rather than caring.

We have grown used to our own ways

and cannot imagine you would ask us to change

even for the sake of the Gospel.

Forgive us when we mistake our familiar traditions for your truth.

Show us how we can witness to your love

through working and worshipping together.

Assurance of Pardon:

Friends hear the Good News: God's mercy is from everlasting to everlasting. It shines into the world and scatters the darkness. Know that you are forgiven and

forgive one another. Be at peace and walk in the newness of life, led by God's light.

Music: #373 Jesus loves me

Scripture Reading: Luke 4:14-21 (NIV)

¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Meditation: "Short and Sweet"

There's a story about an elderly couple that was walking out of church one Sunday. The wife said to the husband, "Did you see the strange hat Mrs. O'Heerne was wearing?" "No, I didn't," replied her husband. "Joe Smith badly needs a haircut, doesn't he?" commented the wife. "Sorry, I didn't notice," replied the husband. "You know John," said the wife impatiently, "Sometimes I wonder if you get anything at all out of going to church".

People go to church for different reasons and often get different things out of going to church depending on what they expect to get when they go there. For example, I wonder what the people who were in the synagogue in today's Gospel reading expected to get out of the service. Certainly they didn't expect to see Jesus

stand and read a portion of Scripture, let alone comment on it. His sermon was and is one of the shortest on record “Today, the Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”.

What did this message mean to the people in the synagogue? What does it mean to us today? To the people in the synagogue, it meant that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the anointed one sent by God to redeem his people. It means the same thing for us today. Christ frees us as sinners from the bonds of sin, guilt and corruption.

By this time, Jesus had already been tempted in the wilderness. He was prepared for this experience because of the foundation built by his attendance in the synagogue, starting when he was a child.

Jesus knew exactly what the people needed to hear that day, and he knew exactly what he wanted to share with them. All of the people gathered in the synagogue, the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, the imprisoned and the blind needed to hear a message of hope and Jesus gave it to them. Christ looked beyond the surface to see the need and he does this for us as well. He wants us to see ourselves as having value because God created each of us as valuable people. The doctrine of the Trinity is interwoven here. He, as the son of God, is uniquely qualified to help us. He sets us free because of his death and resurrection. It is a victory over sin and death, but, and yes there is a but, Jesus does this when we stop trying to solve our problems ourselves and turn to God as a source of our help.

When Jesus read the Scriptures in the synagogue, Jesus announced a “jubilee”, a forgiveness of sin. In Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, which is found in Luke 11:3, there is a sentence that reads as follows: “Forgive us our debts for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us”.

This line is all about granting a fresh start. Our faith in Jesus allows us to have a fresh start in our walk of faith. This is a time in which followers of Christ are told that God’s promises shall come true in our midst and that God will favour us with his blessings. The reality of this statement is that it embraces and welcomes everyone, everyone right down to the least, the last and the lost in the community. All we have to do is remember Jesus’ words, “As you do for the least of these, you do for me”

God is with us today, and his call for action is ever present and at times can be overwhelming. We are often astounded with pleas for support, and we often wonder how we should respond and what good it will do. We must remain

steadfast and true to God and his desire for us to help the less fortunate. Jesus' words in the synagogue are words of hope and inspiration for the oppressed, the hopeless and the discouraged. We can and must build Christ's community of faith right here where we are. Caring for people was Jesus' main concern, and it must be our concern today for we can make a difference.

What would Jesus do and say if he was asked to preach in our society today? Why would we think that the intensity of Christ's call would diminish?

Many of you have heard of the TV and radio host Art Linkletter. He used to host a program called Kids Say the Darndest Things. One of the most annoying questions children ask is "Why?" They ask because they are basically curious. Growing minds starve for understanding, but the thirst for knowledge often disappears as they get older. Is it because their curiosity is stifled by impatient adults? Is it because they and we get used to things and stop asking questions? Is that what happens to us when it comes to understanding God? Is our curiosity stifled by impatient peers, or is it because we get used to things and stop asking questions? The Word of God is both exciting and frightening at the same time.

We can refuse to listen, we can refuse to believe, and we can refuse to let it make a difference for us, but it is still true. The Word of God stands forever, because the Word gives us life. Jesus' obedience to God created the foundation upon which God can build and enter the temple called our heart. Jesus' one-sentence sermon that day in the synagogue was the shortest in history, but it is also the most powerful.

Amen.

Music: #761 Who's goin' to tell the story

Prayer:

God of life, God of love.

You created us and set us in relationship with each other:

In families and neighbourhoods,

in churches and communities,

in cultures and nations.

We give you thanks for the rich gifts of arts and culture,

of home life and community celebration

which bring meaning and encouragement to our lives.

Help us contribute our gifts

to the traditions and imagination that sustain the best of our common life from one generation to the next.

God of mercy and forgiveness,
You call us to live together in peace and unity.
In this Week of Prayer for Christian unity,
we pray that your Spirit will create understanding and co-operation
among all who bear Christ's name.
Help us share our gifts with each other
so that churches within our community may flourish
and our common mission will find new energy after months of challenge.
Lead us to reach out to those of other faiths and no faith
so that, together, we may be a blessing in the world you love.

God of healing and hope,
We pray for our neighbourhoods and our nation.
Where people are divided and bitterness turns into resentment,
show us how to work for reconciliation.
Inspire our leaders at every level of community life
to work together for the care of the most vulnerable
and to restore the goodness of our common life
as we recover from the effects of these months of pandemic.
Make us generous citizens and careful stewards
of the land you entrust to us together.

God of justice and mercy,
We pray for the world you love, the world Christ died to redeem,
so deeply divided by religious and political animosities,
by ancient bitterness and current conflict.
Encourage world leaders to work for peace and understanding,
especially in places torn by violence,
and areas still struggling with the effects of the pandemic,
by poverty, hunger and the effects of natural disasters.
May the hope Jesus embodies encourage us all to work for positive change.

Use us as agents of your healing and hope
as we offer ourselves in Jesus' name in the words he taught us to pray
Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.

Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever.
Amen.

Benediction:

Go in peace from this place and this time, changed and empowered to love God with all your heart and souls and minds.

Now may the LORD keep us and bless us,
May the LORD make his face to shine upon us and be gracious unto us,
Now and for ever more, AMEN.