

Epiphany 4, Year C, January 30, 2022  
Luke 4:21-30  
Epiphany, Winnipeg

What would make you want to throw someone off a cliff? What would make you want to throw the preacher off a cliff? What would make you want to throw a nice hometown son or daughter of the congregation off a cliff?

It's a weird way to start a sermon. But today it fits. Last week we saw Jesus coming to the synagogue and going up to the front to read Scripture. He read that beautiful word from Isaiah about God's Spirit settling on the prophet, and calling that prophet to bring good news to the poor, and sight to the blind; to release the prisoners and to set oppressed people free. And then Jesus sits down and says "Today this scripture is being fulfilled in your own hearing." And everyone joins in and says, "Isn't he a wonder? Listen to those beautiful words, those great things Joseph's son is saying."

But just moments later, those same nice people take Jesus outside to try to throw him off a cliff. How did it come to that?

It might be as simple as this: When everyone is so pleased with how Jesus speaks right there, he says something like, "Yes, you'll want me to do great things right here and make things better in my hometown. But I'm telling you that prophets aren't welcome in their hometown." And then he reminds everybody about two heroes from the Bible who took their message and their work away from their hometown and to someone else. And the people take the hint, and they get the point, that Jesus isn't keeping his work and his words and his life in this place. It's not all about right here. And the people can't stand to hear that. So they try to throw him off a cliff.

A bit of an over-reaction, I guess. And maybe Luke is, you know, stretching the point a bit. But it really matters for us. And it might be annoying, and it might set us free.

Think about it for a minute: We're all so tired after twenty-two months of this. I don't even need to give details, do I? In hospitals and schools and grocery stores and factories and big trucks and pastors' offices and assisted living places and in shelters and...everywhere...we're so tired of it and we want nothing more than to be free of it. And it makes perfect sense that what we want more than anything is to be over it. Back to normal or forward to whatever normal might be next.

But then Jesus comes along and reads ancient ancient scripture about our God who is interested in getting prisoners out of captivity and giving good news to poor people and making the blind see and ending the oppression that so many people endure. And Jesus drops that hint that maybe all this good news is bigger than the walls of the synagogue where he was raised and formed in his faith.

And when we want nothing more than to hear a certain word about how the pandemic will end and to be set free from this tiresome grip, Jesus reminds us that all this good news isn't just for us and what's bugging us most; it's not even for our wish to have normal again. The word that Jesus speaks is for a whole world of people with a whole world of troubles. Not just for the hometown and its worries; not even just for the home church, for us, and for its worries, for our worries.

Depending on the day, that can be really annoying. And depending on the day...well, actually, on any day at all...it can set us free. For the last almost two years we've been caught in this weird cycle of wonder and worry and optimism and disappointment, haven't we? It won't last too long, it's no big deal...it's really bigger than we thought. It's getting better, it's another variant and another wave. We don't need masks...oh, we do need masks. I can go for supper with my friends! I can't go for supper with my friends... The church is open; the church is closed. It's like we're always aiming at a moving target called "getting back to normal." And just when we think it's in our sights it steps out of view again and goes out of focus and we're scrambling to figure out what's next. For almost two years we've been so caught up with that question of getting back to normal; it's almost like that has become who we are. We're trapped in that question.

And then Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah, and he preaches his own short little sermon, and he sets us free. Free to ask instead, "what's our place out there?" "What's our calling in the world?" Who are the poor, or the blind, or the oppressed, or imprisoned, out there? In the place where I work or the place where I study? In the place where I play, on the rink or the court or the pitch? In my church or in my home? In my neighbourhood or in a place further away? God calls us out of the small world of wishing things were different for us here, and gives us the Spirit, the same Spirit that is given to Jesus, or to prophets with names like Isaiah or Jeremiah or Deborah or Mary. And that Spirit calls us to bring a world of good news into the world; to each other and to the world around us. It doesn't have to be in grand gestures and big programs, but in our daily lives, with the people in the places where we spend our days, or in the neighbourhood or city or world that is our home. Jesus sets us free from a question we can never

answer – when will it be normal? - and sets us free for a world we can see all around us, all the time. Jesus sets us free to ask a new question, and to see and care for one another, and to see and bring good freeing news to the world around us.

That's our calling. It's what we're set free to do in the world. And in so many ways it's been happening all around all this time. When everything has been its own kind of strange and frustrating all around us, and when there's been so much worry in the air for so much time, and when we could have been stuck thinking only about being normal again, we still see things like this: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and has sent me to make a big stack of sandwiches, maybe for people I don't even know. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and has sent me to work, where I asked someone how they're doing today. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and I called a friend, and they came over for coffee and cards. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and I prayed for the world, for creation, for all the people. The Spirit of the Lord is upon you, and you, and you, and you, and you listened when someone talked on Bell Let's Talk Day, and you tried to figure out what reconciliation means, and you prayed for people all over the world trying to find a safe home, and someone somewhere welcomed a stranger.

And Jesus stood up and read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." And that word is being fulfilled even as we hear it. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, upon you, upon us... That Spirit keeps moving today; not waiting for a better world, but moving in the world today. Bringing life in the world today. AMEN.