

Feeling the Spirit
A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Wm. D. Peterson
Coeur d'Alene First Presbyterian Church
January 24, 2010

Sermon Text: Luke 4:14-22

NRSV

¹⁴ Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶ 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, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ "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 recover of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ 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. ²¹ The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came out of his mouth. They said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

The Sermon

The text for today's from Luke's Gospel, begins with such wonderful news about how Jesus was being received by the people at the outset of his ministry in his home territory, which was in northern Israel.

Oh if we could just stop there – for Jesus' sake, if not for ours.

A comparison in politics would be – at least for those who wanted him to succeed – if we could have just stopped the story of Barack Obama's presidency while there was still the glow of his election and inauguration; or in sports, if we could stop the story after those initial wins, when all still believed a losing program was indeed going to be turned around, and when all the faithful are filled with hope.

Indeed, for whatever reasons, those who decided on the Gospel lesson to be read on specific Sundays as they developed the Revised Common Lectionary, do stop the story of Jesus' active entry into ministry, while Jesus is still being treated like the local boy made good.

However, if you want to only feel the "good vibes" of Spirit-filled religion, I wouldn't advise that you return to worship next Sunday, because Jesus does not fare well with the locals once his teaching in their synagogue gets a little too up close and personal. My sermon title for next week is "Religious convictions and Mob Mentality," so be forewarned.

So, what happens between this portion of Luke Chapter 4, and the remainder of the chapter? In modern idiom, Jesus goes from preaching to meddling.

In my 16 years of ordained ministry, I've found that this tipping point between the congregation's – or individuals within the congregation's – love for you, and wishing you'd just shut up, is when you stop talking about "other peoples' sins, and get too close to their own.

In other words, whomever is commenting on the text in a first century synagogue, or a twenty-first century church, had best know the locals' tolerance for certain practices that others might consider sin.

For example, I went to seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, so my seminary colleagues and I "cut our preaching teeth" on Sundays primarily in small rural Kentucky and Southern Indiana congregations. Our preaching pros and other wise faculty mentors, would know that we novice preachers were all fired up to save the world by talking about justice, and race relations, and the so-called evils of society. So, they'd call us in before Sunday number one, and tell us, "If you'd like to be asked to come back and fill their pulpit on future Sundays, I'd advise you not to talk about the evils of tobacco, whiskey, and betting on the horses, for those have been bed-rock ways for their family's to earn a living for generations."

So, what's my point?

My point, and I believe the Gospel writer we know as Luke's point, is that this "being filled with the Spirit," can be dangerous to your health.

Oh, it's okay if you stick with the feel-good ecstatic parts.

But, apparently and obviously given the history of the life-spans of prophets throughout the centuries, it is not okay if you start telling folk that they are not living up to God's Spirit-related intentions.

In each of the four Gospels we don't get to the adult Jesus without going through his engagement with that fiery prophet John.

In Luke's Gospel, the stories of the lives of John who will come to be know as the Baptist or the "Baptizer," are linked from the time of their miraculous conceptions and their kinship.

You'll recall that John is represented in Luke as the miracle child of an elderly childless couple – the theme of barrenness that is so common in Scripture, and Jesus as the product of a Spirit-consummated conception of a young woman.

We get glimpses of the spirit-filled and devout lives of both John and Jesus, and then the climactic point of contact when John is the well known prophet calling people to repentance, and Jesus is the unknown as yet "One who is to come."

Could there be any more promising a scenario of God being at work in two lives?

We are told that all the country-side is flocking to John to be scolded and shamed with what the people know is the truth of their condition, and that Jesus comes to be baptized as well.

We are told that when Jesus had been baptized he saw the heavens open, and had

a vision of the Spirit of God descending like a dove upon him.

We are told he heard a voice from heaven declaring him to be God's beloved.

Does it get any better than that?

Maybe an appropriate response, should you ever have such an experience, would be, "Uh, God, I hate to talk back to you, but didn't you pick the wrong person here? Wouldn't you – or at least me – be better off if your incoming dove targeted someone else? I mean, I love you and all, and I'd like to feel your love and your blessing, but I'm getting a little anxious when I think about the consequences of such direct attention."

I can hear you thinking, "Why, Pastor, such blasphemy."

Is it?

What happens next to Jesus –after his baptism that is?

He gets "driven" by this same Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by, of all extra-worldly creatures, Satan himself."

Ironically, in the prayer which we attribute to our Lord, we recite, "Lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil."

Good for us, apparently, but to be truly Spirit-filled, I guess you'd best face some temptation, and learn how to deal with the bad stuff in life."

And what are we told happens subsequently to miraculously born and Spirit-filled John and then Jesus?

John is arrested because his concept of sin means that even rulers can be called into account when they violate the norms of family relationships. Further, John's life is ended very prematurely through very gruesome means.

And, what about the miraculously born and Spirit-filled Jesus?

He too, within just a year of beginning his ministry, if we follow the time-line set forth in Matthew, Mark and Luke, is arrested and put to death.

Why?

We're told it is because they offended the wrong people.

We're told it is because they professed that God cared about the little people as much or more than the rich and powerful.

We're told that it is because they reminded their listeners that God does not want all the power and wealth in the hands of a few, while the others suffer.

We are told that it is because they risked offending not only the home crowd, but whomever they saw needing to be called into account.

So, on this Sunday in January, in the year of our Lord 2010, I would recommend to Brock and Lexie, as the parents of Kahrs – whose baptism we celebrated today at his tender age of two – and who I know given our conversation yesterday that you desire to have raised knowing the ways of God's will, just watch out if it appears

he is destined to be a prophet.

Why, not only would he be likely to call the two of you into account for your lifestyles, but even more risky, he might just dare to call others into account for failing to live up to what the Spirit truly calls for us to value.

May those who have ears to hear, perceive the Word of God for our lives and our values, and our actions toward those whom God loves whether or not they seem very lovable to us, such as the poor, the halt, the lame, the blind, the wrong political adherents, those with different interpretations of Scripture, and

Amen.