

Streetsville United Church

Sunday, January 27, 2019

Rev. John Tapscott

“WHEN SCRIPTURE IS FULFILLED”

Luke 4:21

The reading from Luke 4 began with verse 14, “Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.” So Jesus began to teach in the synagogues of Galilee and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. Note those words, “as was his custom.” When the Sabbath rolled around every week, Jesus could be found in the synagogue. He went to worship regularly.

Things have changed for God’s people. There are still people who worship every Sabbath, faithfully, without missing, except on rare occasions. Nowadays though, you are considered a regular church attender if you are here 2 out of 4 Sundays a month. Now if you come here more often than that, say 3 or 4 Sundays out of 4, God bless you, and I don’t want you to cut back. It’s good to be above average in some things.

But many churches these days are wondering how to encourage more regular attendance. Lecturing is not enough. Not even pointing to the example of Jesus does much good. So some churches are trying bold schemes to bring people to church more often. Here are a few of them: Offering air miles with each visit; every fourth week holding a 50/50 draw with the offering; opening a Tim Horton’s franchise in the lobby; installing reclining pews; every time worshipers attend they receive a stamp on their “Get into heaven” card; and a couple of serious ones that some churches have actually tried: guaranteeing that the service will be over in 45 minutes or less; holding a weekly worship service at the local hockey arena.

But the point of this passage is not just that Jesus went to the synagogue regularly. The key point is what he did and what he said there on that particular day. It was the custom for one layperson every Sabbath to read Scripture and comment on it. So with Jesus back home in Nazareth, it was natural that this honour be given to him. He stood up to read as the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. Deliberately he found the place where it is written, “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, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” He read the words and then rolled up the scroll and sat down. Everyone was watching him and listening intently for his comments. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” No doubt he repeated it several times, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus was applying this passage to himself. “Today, this Scripture has come true in me. I am the One whom Isaiah is

talking about. I am Promised One this is my work, the work God sent me to do. And I'm doing it now - today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

This statement probably came as a bolt of lightning to the listeners for they knew Jesus so well. He was the carpenter's son. But God did fulfill the prophet's words in him. God's Spirit was upon Jesus, empowering him to bring good news to the poor. God sent him to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free as he proclaimed Jubilee, the year of God's mercy for those crushed by heavy burdens. And it wasn't just that Jesus proclaimed these things, but that he actually did them by his works, his death and his resurrection. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this Scripture today and every day and forever.

Now we are not Jesus, of course. None of us is God's unique Son. But Scripture is being fulfilled in us, too, in all of God's people. By the power of His Holy Spirit God is causing Scripture to come true in you and in me. How do we know when Scripture is being fulfilled in our lives?

First, Scripture is being fulfilled in us when it leads us to Jesus.

That is the main purpose of Scripture, to lead people to Jesus. Just as the bright star in the sky led the wise men to Jesus, so the Scriptures lead us to him, so that we may worship him and bow before him as King and acknowledge him as Lord and Christ.

John says about his Gospel that "these things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his Name." This is true of all Scripture, including the Old Testament. Interpreted correctly, all Scripture leads us to Christ. All the highways and byways of Scripture eventually lead to him who is the center of Scripture. Scripture is the manger in which Christ is laid. He is the fulfillment of all Scripture and all Scripture must be understood in light of him.

Now when Isaiah was inspired by God to write the prophecy that Jesus applied to himself, Isaiah couldn't yet put Jesus' Name in there. But he was moved to speak of the One who was coming in the future, one who would do this very work of God. The Old Testament points to Christ and his work from before he came; the New Testament points back to his earthly sojourn and what he accomplished for us through his life, death and resurrection. The New Testament also points ahead to his coming again as Judge and King when his Lordship will be acknowledged by all people, and all things are made new, a new heaven and new earth, joined together as God's eternal Kingdom.

So when you sense Scripture leading you to Jesus and a stronger faith in him you know that Scripture is being fulfilled in you. When you can say, "Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ as my Saviour," then you can also say, "Today Scripture is fulfilled in me." In fact, there is nothing more important. When you feel yourself being covered by God's grace, when you know that your sins have been cleansed by the Saviour's blood, when God opens your eyes to see new and wonderful things in the Bible and in God's world; when you are released from crushing burdens; when new hopes of heaven arise within you, then Scripture is being fulfilled in you. When you find yourself living more fully in Christ and the fruits of the Spirit are growing in you, then Scripture is being fulfilled

in you. When you learn to trust the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, then Scripture is being fulfilled in you. When Christ becomes more real in your life; when you trust him more and take a further step along his way then you know that Scripture is being fulfilled in you.

Here's a second way we know when Scripture is being fulfilled in us. *It's when Scripture moves us.*

Now there are two aspects to this. Here's the first. Scripture is being fulfilled in you and in me when it moves us inwardly, when it touches us deep inside.

Scripture can move us to great joy. When Ezra brought out the Scriptures before the people and the scribes read to them all day, the people wept, not in sadness, but with joy. You see, the law of Moses had been buried; the people hadn't heard it for years, perhaps for generations. But when they heard God's word being read, it was like a new revelation to them. They knew that God had not forgotten them or left them to find their own way or to walk in the dark. They knew that God cared for them, enough to give them his word to lead them in the paths of righteousness. They were moved to weep tears of joy. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." said Nehemiah. The Scriptures can move us to great joy as we hear God's great promises to us, as we hear of his saving grace, his personal care for you and for me, his great love in Christ Jesus our Lord from which we can never be separated.

The Scripture can also warm our hearts as it did for two disciples on the Emmaus Road when the Risen Christ interpreted Scripture for them. Have you ever felt your heart strangely warmed and comforted by Scripture? It happened to John Wesley and it happens for us, too. Does the word of God sometimes bring you great peace and assurance? Then the word of God is being fulfilled in you.

Of course, God's word can also cause us to feel sorrow which moves us to repent and to change our ways. On the Day of Pentecost Peter preached the gospel in Jerusalem. His fellow countrymen heard of their role in Jesus' crucifixion and then how God raised him from the dead to be Lord and Christ. The people were cut to the heart and asked, "Brothers what should we do?" Peter said, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ and you shall be forgiven of your sins and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Scripture is being fulfilled in us when it stirs us and moves us inwardly.

Scripture is also being fulfilled in us when it moves us into action. James tells us, "Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." When the Scripture causes you to ask, "What should I do?" and moves you to act then Scripture is being fulfilled in you. You see, each of us has a role in Jesus' ongoing ministry in the world. That's so often how the Risen Christ does the work of God's Kingdom in the world today – through the people whom he has called, saved and made his own, people like you and me. Scripture moves us to take part in Jesus' ongoing work of bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, helping the oppressed to go free and proclaiming the day of God's salvation. Each of us has been given gifts for participating in Christ's ministry. And when Scripture moves

you to get out of your comfortable pew and actually do something for Christ and the Kingdom, then Scripture is being fulfilled in you.

So God is fulfilling Scripture in you when Scripture leads you to Christ, and when it moves you both inwardly and outwardly.

Finally, Scripture is being fulfilled in us when it fills us with power.

Remember verse 14. "Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit returned to Galilee." Do you know why he was filled with the power of the Spirit? It's because just before this, Jesus had been in the wilderness fending off Satan's temptations, relying on the truth of the Scriptures. Three times he quoted God's word from Deuteronomy and three times he won the victory. And the experience of relying on Scripture really filled him with power. You see, the word and the Holy Spirit work together. Relying on the Word filled Jesus with power for his mission. Jesus' knew a lot of rejection in his ministry and his life, right from the beginning, and we're going to talk about that rejection next week. In fact, the same people who praised Jesus on this day soon turned against him and tried to throw him off a cliff. Yes, Jesus knew rejection, but undergirded by God's Word and empowered by the Holy Spirit Jesus persevered all the way to Calvary.

Salespeople may have ten rejections, but one sale will overcome all the rejections and enable them to keep going. They feel empowered for the next call. When you sense Holy Scripture giving you power to persevere in the Christian life despite setbacks and discouragements, then you know that Scripture is being fulfilled in you. So hear and read and trust God's word. Let it take hold of you. Pay attention to it. And Scripture will be fulfilled in you. Perhaps right now. "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."