

Twenty First Sunday after Pentecost, Feast of St. Luke the Evangelist-October 18, 2015, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 4:14-21

"Hometown"

"He went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up." (Luke 4:16) Jesus was returning to the place that he spent the early years of his life on earth. If you are like me, and have moved away from the place of your youth, you have fond memories of that place, that town, and most likely of the people as well. Nazareth is the place where the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her that *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. And for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God."* (Luke 1:35) Let me tell you a little bit about Nazareth, if you have ever been there, it is now an Arab town and there is a big sign that you see as you are walking up the hill to the church of the Annunciation, where Mary got that news from the Angel Gabriel, and you can actually see the home where it is believed that Mary lived. This sign on the hill and it is an "in your face" sign that says "Allah has no son – it is basically not welcoming you. It is kind of scary. I would hope that we would be welcome in each other's homes, but this sign that stood there gave us a feeling of "watch out!" In the days of Jesus, or the days of Mary and Joseph, Nazareth was a small town on a hillside, about the size of a football field, in northern Galilee, where I am sure everyone knew what was going on in each other's caves and stone homes. You know what it is like – we live in a small town, I know, it is a city, but word gets around real fast when you care about each other. For all intents and purposes, Jesus was home, among friends, possibly relatives and neighbors, and the news about Him apparently had preceded Him – the word had spread.

Many of you have been in Douglas your whole lives – and it is a unique situation when you move away. Then what do you consider your hometown? Hometowns can mean different things to different people – even within the same family. My hometown memories are in a town called Merrick, on Long Island, New York while Marilyn's are in a town right next door called Bellmore. Our children's hometowns are really a matter of their point of view, since during their early years we lived in Merrick and Somers, New York, in upstate Westchester County – but it would be my guess that both John and Theresa might remember a lot more about Jacksonville, Florida, for it is there that they really grew, especially spiritually. Theresa also went to Turkey for 8 weeks and then lived in German for three years. Andrew, our son in law, I am happy to say is now home from Germany. We have been blessed to visit most of these places over the years – and none of them feel like home anymore – and I really must tell you all of these places have changed, some dramatically – like the growth on Long Island, with astronomical housing prices, and how Jacksonville has exploded with growth. If you have been there recently, you just have to get on the interstate – put the car in neutral and let the updraft take you! Things and places are different – people are different. Plus, we are all very different people than when we lived there. At this point in our lives – Marilyn and I consider Douglas our home.

Ok, so what does this have to do with Jesus' return to Nazareth? When Jesus had left Nazareth, He had not yet started His ministry; His track record was clean, and there were no healings

and miracles to report about. Possibly to the other Nazarenes, Jesus was just the son of Joseph and Mary, a youngster who grew up in their neighborhood, the son of a carpenter. But He experienced His baptism, and then the temptation in the desert. On His return however, things would be VERY different.

Jesus attended the synagogue on Saturday, the Sabbath, and He read from the scroll. Please open your Pew Bibles to page 1598 – to Luke 4:18. Jesus was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and He read from Isaiah 61: "*THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS ON ME, BECAUSE HE HAS ANOINTED ME TO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM FREEDOM FOR THE PRISONERS, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET THE OPPRESSED FREE, TO PROCLAIM THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR.*" (Luke 4:18-19) Jesus was proclaiming, publicly who He was, and what His mission on earth was. He was filled with the Holy Spirit of God, for His baptism and temptations had just happened and so He was bringing the good news of salvation to the poor, and the brokenhearted. He raised and comforted those oppressed with disease and even death; He brought sight to the blind. To the prisoners of physical and spiritual bondage, He preached deliverance – permanent release from their master – sin. Jesus spoke of "*THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR*" (Luke 4:19) telling us of His offer of mercy, the salvation that would be offered to those who receive Him and believe in Him. Belief is the key!

The crowd in the synagogue that day was listening attentively to their homegrown son, until Jesus proclaimed in verse 21: "*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*" Not only had He announced His ministry, He had revealed His identity, He is the Messiah, the anointed One! I am sure their reaction was one of great surprise, and possibly even could have been "did I just hear what I thought I just heard?" It was quite possibly a similar reaction to that of my Director at AT&T Universal Card when upon returning from a trip to Israel in 1999, He told me it was that time of year. It was appraisal time and he informed me that he needed to put at the bottom of the appraisal, what you want to do long term. I told him that "you don't want to know" and I told him that I had been called by God and would be leaving to attend seminary and become an Anglican priest. I can tell you this - it was news that he least expected. He was surprised to say the least and hearing my words was the last thing he expected. And the people of Nazareth were probably just as surprised hearing from their native son, that it was being fulfilled in front of them. They were expecting a different type of Messiah, one who would "*set the oppressed free.*" (Luke 4:18).

Jesus stopped short of finishing the verse from Isaiah 61:2, leaving off "*the day of vengeance of our God,*" because I believe this foretold His "second coming." What He said to them next would shock them. He went on to tell them "*Surely you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! And you will tell Me 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did at Capernaum.'*" (Luke 4:23). Jesus came right out and told the people of His hometown that just because He was their native son, not to expect any favors, and that He predicted that even they would reject Him. Well, if that didn't produce some steam between

some ears, what Jesus did next probably caused some real anger amongst those who were present.

Jesus reminded those in the synagogue that day - that God, through Elijah, showed mercy on a Gentile widow in Sidon. God miraculously made her grain and oil supply last until the famine was over. When her son died, God heard Elijah's cry and raised him back to life.

Jesus then made another Old Testament reference, pointing to Elisha, (Elijah's friend and successor) God's prophet, who healed Naaman, the commander of the Syrian Army from leprosy. Elisha had him dip himself seven times in the Jordan River, and God healed him from his painful and unclean affliction. Naaman was not just a Gentile, but the commander of the enemy army.

In effect - Jesus was telling the people of Nazareth – the Jewish people - that God's salvation was offered equally to all of humanity, not just the people of Israel – the apple of God's eye. Throughout history the Israelites unfaithfulness to the covenant had angered God, and He now would expand His New Covenant through Jesus to the rest of the world. This was too much for the Jewish people in the synagogue, for they absolutely hated the Gentiles. And they hated what Jesus was telling them. Yahweh was their God and they were His chosen people. Here - Jesus was removing the boundaries, and they didn't like it. Please look at with me verses 28, 29 and 30 on page 1599. *"All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this." "They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way."* Isn't that amazing? Miraculously, nothing was going to stop what God had planned for all of humanity, for Jesus' ministry and mission. By the power of God almighty - Jesus supernaturally walked away, totally and completely unscathed. It was not His time to suffer.

As followers of Jesus, we know that it is through His death on the cross that Jesus carried out His promise of salvation to all people, Jew and Gentile alike. The Old Testament reading today from the Prophet Isaiah reminds us clearly that Jesus suffered on our behalf – and *"He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed."* (Isaiah 53:4) I want you to think of that again. Many times people think that by Jesus' going to the cross we are saved. People who are suffering with afflictions of body, mind and spirit; let me repeat this again *"by His wounds we are healed."* Jesus went to the cross for our salvation AND our healing! If you believe that then you have faith in Jesus as the Healer to touch the affliction of your body and make you whole. I have seen it happen and I know it can happen. His offer is made to each one of us, and all we need to do is to accept it. We are free to accept Jesus as our Messiah and the Lord of our lives. He wants us just as we are, warts and all. There is an old saying "the closer you get the bigger the warts are!" He wants us to spend eternity with Him in our eternal hometown.

Jesus made that promise – the promise of God the Father crystal clear when Nicodemus, the member of the Sanhedrin, came to Him at night. He asked how he could be born again. Jesus told him: *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”* (John 3:16-21) Don't let anyone stop you after John 3:16 – they need to hear the rest of the TRUTH!

Have you ever walked into a dark room – you cannot see a whole heck of a lot. When you turn on the lights – you see everything! Jesus is the light and He reveals everything to us.

God's promise is not selective but is for all people – and it is the choice – the free will of those people to accept His promise and spend eternity in His presence - or to reject it – and face the judgment of your own righteousness, and not the righteousness of Jesus Christ – given to those who believe in Him - by His sacrifice on the cross. The choice is clear and will determine whether or not you are going home – or where your new hometown will be. The choice is yours!