

"Live For Today!"
Epiphany 3 Series C

Luke 4:14-21
January 24, 2010

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"
Luke 4:21

"Live For Today!" That's not the sort of sermon title that you might expect to see in a Christian church. "Live For Today!" might be a more appropriate title for a book on hedonism, or the title of a lecture on self-indulgence. When I hear the motto, "Live For Today," I am reminded of the sailor who returned to his ship after having had a weekend off. The captain asked the young sailor, "How did you spend your money?" He answered, "I spent most of it on wine, women, and song. The rest I spent foolishly!"

"Live for today," is a slogan one might expect to hear from a person who is prone to self-indulgence. But that is not the sense in which I want you to hear that slogan this morning. No, I take my sermon title from verse 21 of Luke chapter 4, today's gospel reading. Jesus says, "**Today** this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The key word is, "**today**."

But in order to understand the significance of the word, "today," we must go back to the beginning of the gospel reading and hear the story once more.

The story is simple. Jesus came home for the weekend, as young adults often do. Home from college, home from military service, home from a new job. Home to see Mom and Dad, and to check out what's happening in Jesus' home town of Nazareth.

Jesus came home for the weekend, with stories to tell about his marvelous adventures in distant places. He had left home some time ago to seek his destiny. Now, he was home again, a changed man, a man with a mission, anointed for God's service.

It says that Jesus returned home filled with the power of the Spirit. Not just any spirit, mind you. Jesus came home filled with **the** Spirit, the Holy Spirit...saturated with the love of God, energized to do God's will, consumed with a passion for the kingdom of God. He had a mission to fulfill.

He had stories to tell his parents, marvelous stories full of wonder and awe. Stories about his cousin John, stories about his baptism in the Jordan River, the parting of the clouds, the dove from on high, the voice of God speaking, "You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased."

He had stories to tell his friends, as young people do, about the temptations he faced away from home...his trial in the wilderness, his encounters with Satan, his victory, his steadfast faith, his complete rejection of the devil's ways.

Jesus came home for the weekend, filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. And the rumors and the gossip about him quickly spread through that little town of Nazareth. And when they all heard the news, they were very surprised and they all went to the synagogue to see him, to listen to him, and to hear his story.

Jesus came; he stood up to read; they gave him the book of Isaiah—not a book but a scroll. He took it; he rolled it out; and he read aloud to them all the dreams of that prophet Isaiah, of the days to come, the days of God's kingdom, the days of forgiveness, the days of reconciliation, all his dreams about women and men living harmoniously together, nations at peace, swords being hammered into ploughshares and their spears into garden hoes, children playing freely without fear, the blind ones seeing, the prisoners liberated, a period of grace when all debts are forgiven.

*And he said: "**That day is starting now.**"*
"**Today** this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," said Jesus to his Nazareth neighbors.

The time Isaiah the prophet dreamed about, that time is **now**, Jesus said. The prophecy of Isaiah, spoken long ago, is happening right now, before your very eyes.

Good news for the poor, release for the captives, sight for the blind, freedom for the

oppressed the year of the Lord's favor. Starting **today**, Jesus said, beginning **now**. *Good news for the poor, release for the captives, sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed, the year of the Lord's favor.*

Today, this scripture is being fulfilled as you hear it.

Now, wait just a minute Jesus! How can you say that, Jesus? God's people have been waiting and praying for a long long time for all these good things to happen. We've been praying for hundreds of years, for two millennia, praying that **one day** all swords may be hammered into sickles and ploughshares, praying that **one day** the hungry children of the world will be fed, praying that **one day** the blind may see, praying that **one day** the oppressed will be set free, praying that **one day** brothers and sisters will forgive each other.

And now, Jesus, you're telling us that all these prayers have been answered? That all these dreams have come true? That our waiting is over? **Today**, you say? **Today**, these scriptures have been fulfilled?

Yes, says Jesus, **today!** The time is now! The day has come! This is it! The moment you've been praying for, longing for, yearning for...is **now!** You are living in the hour of fulfillment, the day when all your prayers are being answered. I'm telling you. *good news for the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed, the year of the Lord's favor.*

My dear family and friends in Christ, I urge you to believe that what Jesus said is true. The hour of the kingdom of God has come. The reign of God is here in Jesus Christ. It has begun. It is not off in the future. It is today. Jesus Christ reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords today.

And that's why I have chosen this title for my sermon. **Live For Today!** What I mean to say is, live the kingdom life **today**. Live the promise fulfilled **today**.

I fully realize that we do not live in paradise . . . not yet. I fully realize that there are tens of

thousands buried and dead as a result of earthquakes in Malawi and Haiti. I fully realize that there are evil doers in this world who seek to work their woe upon us. I realize that sickness and broken relationships are a reality and not a dream. But in the Kingdom of God which has dawned upon us in Jesus Christ, the past is behind us. The future is now. And the kingdom of God is among us right now. **Today!**

What does this mean for you and me? Well, it means that **today** is the day to forgive those who have wronged you. Why do you think Jesus stressed forgiveness so much? **Today** is the time to do justice for the poor, to provide health care and healing to all who are sick, no matter their station in life. Today is the time to put an end to homelessness and hunger. I don't care who is in the White House or which political party has a majority in congress. I'm not telling you about secular powers. I'm talking about the reign of God in people's lives **Today**.

Today is the time to make peace with our enemies. **Today** is the day to be building schools in far reaches of mountainous Pakistan and Afghanistan like Greg Mortenson is doing. **Today** is the day to promote peace with books, not bombs.

Today is the time to be reconciled with each other. **Today** the time for the dreams of the prophets to be fulfilled.

Now, you might be confused by what I'm saying because you've always thought of God's kingdom as something off in the future, in the sweet bye and bye, when you die, in heaven. Or, if you ever believed that the kingdom of God would arrive here on earth, you probably envisioned a day way far off over the horizon.

But Jesus says, no, **today**, the scripture is fulfilled. **Today** is the day to begin living the reign of God. That means that now is the time for the evils of the past to be overcome.

It also means that if you and I are not a part of the action, if you and I are not living the kingdom life **today**, if you and I are not honoring the poor, if you and I are not liberating those who are in bondage, not lifting up the lowly, failing to shed

light in the darkness of this world, then you and I are not living in the reality of God's reign. You and I are unfaithful to Jesus, and we are deceiving ourselves when we say that we are his followers.

If we believe, as Jesus said, that **now** is the time of God's reign, then my life and yours need to be tuned to God's frequency, in line with his administration of this world, caught up in living the life of God's reign here and now.

You and I will be about the business of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and housing the homeless, providing healing and health care for those who are sick or injured. Those are hot political issues right now in America, aren't they? There is a great national debate about the best way to lift up those who are at the bottom, how to liberate those who are trapped in poverty.

That's not just politics as usual. That's kingdom work, my friend! That's God's business. And the time to be about God's business is not somewhere off in the sweet bye and bye. The time is now. **Today** is the day to fulfill God's perfect will.

And all those people who maintain that grace and mercy are above and beyond us, who say that justice cannot be done, who say that the poor cannot be fed, clothed, and housed and that the sick cannot receive health care.....who maintain that peace cannot be won, that reconciliation is impossible.....all those people **do not have** the mind of Christ. They **do not have** the spirit of Christ, **do not share** Christ's vision, and they are **not** his disciples!

So the crucial question before us this morning is not, "**Can** you believe that God's reign has come in Jesus Christ." But rather, "Are you **willing** to believe that God's reign has come in Jesus Christ?"

Are you going to live today as if God's reign is not here, that it's somewhere off in the future, over a distant horizon? Or, are you going to live the kingdom life **for today**?

When Jesus came home for the weekend, he said, "**Now**, is the time you've been waiting for." Amen