

Third Sunday after The Epiphany - Year C
January 24, 2010
The Reverend Brett P. Backus

“The Time Is Now”

Luke 4:14-21

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

The time is now.

So, I was planning on doing something a little unconventional for this morning's sermon. Originally, I was planning on showing you all the video that was made by our youth group and presented to our vestry at our recent vestry retreat. Actually, I had this video all ready to go for this morning. I had come to the church over the weekend and setup everything, made sure that the audio would work and that the video would show clearly, but then last night, something happened and I decided against showing this video. In part, I think it is because something in this morning's Gospel lesson really called to me and I felt I needed to focus on a different message. However, on the other hand, I am pretty sure now that I decided not to show you all our youth group's video this morning mainly because I am pretty much just a big wimp! Sorry.

We encounter Jesus in this morning's Gospel lesson in a pivotal and exciting time. Jesus has just recently had what we like to call a mountain top experience. He has been baptized in the Jordan river by John the Baptist, and it was at that point that Jesus really seemed to realize and begin to fulfill His role, His ministry. In other words, Jesus began to do the work that God had given Him to do. However, as we know, almost immediately after His mountain top experience, Jesus entered a dark time, a difficult time. He went into the desert for 40 days and 40 nights where he was constantly and relentlessly tempted.

Of course, Jesus made it through the desert, and interestingly, after this dark time, Jesus went home. He returned to His roots, to Galilee, Nazareth. This is where we encounter Jesus in this morning's Gospel. Jesus has come back home, He has regained His footing, and He proclaims to the people through the reading of Isaiah, that the time has come, the time is now. Jesus proclaims to the people in this morning's Gospel that the time to make the crooked path straight, to make the wrong right, and to fix the broken has finally come and that He, Jesus, is the person anointed and chosen to fulfill that task. In other words, Jesus is saying that the time is now.

As I read this morning's Gospel lesson, I began to realize something. I began to realize that all I could see were parallels, parallels between these events in Jesus' life and the story of this church community, the story of Ascension. You see, growing up at the Episcopal Church of the Good Samaritan in Cedar Bluff, we knew of you all here at Ascension. Actually, we were fully aware, and in fact were somewhat envious of the incredible work and ministry that was taking place here at that time. It was apparent that God was blessing your work. At that time this place was bursting at the seams, your programs were growing with excitement, and your building was exploding with people, with growth. So much so that I remember there being portables out in the parking lot which had to be used simply to house all the people who were showing up for your Christian education programs. As I see it, this was Ascension's mountain top experience. Ascension knew its role and embraced its call.

However, not too long after that mountain top experience, this community also slipped into a valley. Rather, like Jesus, it went into the desert for a period of difficulty, of darkness, of temptation. It was a hard time and indeed a time of loss. Yet, there was hope on the horizon and somehow this community, this family made its way back home.

Through new leadership, a renewed sense of call, Ascension, like Jesus, went back to its roots. This community went back to doing those things to which it was called, it went back to doing the work that God had given it to do. I actually witnessed part of this renewal in my own way. As I have said before in other words, I did not want to interview with Ascension partly because I thought it to be a broken community. I thought that it was still wandering in the desert. However, I very quickly learned that this was not the case, but rather, that this community had indeed experienced a time of healing, a time of change, and I quickly became excited for the chance to be a part of it.

So you see, I believe that we here at Ascension are presently in a place that is much like Jesus' when we encounter Him in this morning's Gospel lesson. We have had our mountain top experience, we have been blessed in our ministry. We have also been to the desert, and we have been broken. But we have also experienced our time of healing and renewal. We have returned home, we have gone back to our roots. Now, as I see it, we at Ascension find ourselves in an equally pivotal and exciting time. We find ourselves in a time where we, like Jesus, can again own our call to serve God and to be certain about the work that God has given us to do as a Christian community. We, as members of this church family, as participants in this spiritual community, find ourselves at a time when we, like Jesus, can truly realize that now is the time. Really, in a way, this is the heart of my message for us this morning. It is simply to call us to realize where we are as a church community,

where we have come from, and where we are being called to go. My message this morning is a simple call to us all to realize that the time is now.

If you were here last week, then in place of a sermon you saw our vestry come up here and you heard our senior warden, Julie Hembree, give a report on our recent vestry retreat. As part of that report you heard news that some pretty big decisions were made at our retreat, decisions having to do with the two main things that Fr. Howard named as our greatest needs and points of focus for the coming year, Ascension's youth program, and our buildings and grounds. This morning, I would like to encourage all of us to take an interest in and to become involved in these two issues currently before us here at Ascension. Watch the youth video that I was going to play for you this morning (It is playing continuously out in the lobby), and go on the tour of our buildings and grounds that Rick Turner is guiding today after our 10:30 service. When you become involved in these areas of Ascension's life, of your church's life, you will see two things. First, you will realize that we are truly blessed and there is a lot we have to be thankful for. Our building is gorgeous and is in fact one of the most beautiful sanctuaries in the area, and our youth program is growing and continues to be successful. However, second, you will also inevitably see clearly that we have a lot of work ahead of us. Our buildings and grounds have some serious repair needs, our youth program desperately needs another level of investment and commitment, and though these are both large and difficult tasks, I truly believe that the time is now.

The truth is, I changed my plans for this morning's sermon not because I wanted to, or because I was leery of doing something outside of the norm, but because, the way I saw it, I honestly had no other choice. This morning's Gospel lesson spoke so clearly to me a message about where this church has been, where we are now, and where we need to go, that I could do nothing else but share it with you today. This church community, you, Ascension, has been high on the mountain, you have gone down into the desert, and you have found your way back home. Now, in my opinion, we find ourselves once again on solid ground, and with an opportunity to begin again doing the tasks that God has set before us, all the while reaching out in faith to embrace whatever may come.

The time is now.

Amen.