



Jan. 27, 2019 Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21 & Neh. 8: 2-10

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Stone, Naomi. [Path of the Wayfarer](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [Our Longing for God's Justice](#)

[Lk 4: 14-21](#) video

#### ENTERING THE SCENE:

Let us imagine that Jesus has just unrolled the huge scroll, finds Isaiah and goes almost the very end of the book, read the portion he chose, and now is sitting down to field questions. We take special note that he left out; "and the day of vengeance of our God". We were with him until he did this. What is he claiming about himself, about God? What am I going to do about the mixed feelings I have about what just happened? On one hand I feel liberated from the judgmental God, on the other hand he is asking me to stretch way beyond my comfort zone. And then I remember, he is just the carpenter from down the road.

#### Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

1 **Many** have undertaken to compile a **narrative** of the events, which have been **fulfilled** in our midst, 2 **precisely** as those events were transmitted to us by the **original eyewitnesses** and **ministers** of the word. I too have carefully traced the whole sequence of events from the beginning, 3 and have decided to set it in writing for you, **Theophilus**, 4 so that **Your Excellency** may see how reliable the **instruction** was that you **received**.

4:14 Jesus returned to **Galilee** in the power of the **Spirit**, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He taught in their **synagogues**, and everyone praised him. 16 He went to **Nazareth**, where he had been brought up, and on the **Sabbath day** he went into the **synagogue**, as was his **custom**. And he stood up to read. 17 The **scroll** of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18 The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has **anointed me** to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim **freedom** for the prisoners and **recovery** of sight for the blind, to **release** the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the **Lord's favor**." 20 Then he rolled up the **scroll**, gave it back to the attendant and **sat down**. The eyes of everyone in the **synagogue** were fastened on him, 21 and he began by saying to them, "**Today** this scripture is **fulfilled** in your hearing."

**DISCUSSION QUESTION:** Jesus said: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Do you think you would have gone home full of hope or fear? If hope, why? If fear, why?

**PRAYER:** Jesus, courageous guide, I cling to your words like they are a life raft and I am going down a roaring rapids. My eyes are fastened on you as I choose each day to believe your good news. Like those people in the synagogue that day I hope that this time won't be a disappointment like all those others who claimed to be the "one from God". My fears take hold of me as I grip the side of the raft, because I know that overcoming my old ways of believing involves risks. Help me as I learn to trust. Amen.

#### WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

**MANY:** The word many, implies a large indefinite amount. Luke starts his gospel with the recognition that there existed multiple gospels. By the time he gets to writing to his friend Theophilus somewhere around 60-62 C.E., he has decided to do a systematic investigation and make do this for the new convert who seems to want to verify his newly chosen faith.

*Have I ever stumbled over some of the differences contained in the four gospels, and found myself asking, "Which way was it?" How do I deal with the questions that arise from these differences?*

**NARRATIVE:** A narrative is a literary form that relates a story in a manner that can be told. All the gospels were stories told over and over, one person to another until the faith communities decided to write their memories down.

*Do I think it would have been better to have only one gospel? If so, why? If not, why?*

**FULFILLED:** To fulfill something is to make it complete. Luke uses the word to indicate that what he is about to narrate is a complete account of what is to be believed. Jesus uses the word to indicate that Isaiah's prophecy was now being completed in him.  
*Does studying the bible help me to arrive at that sense of fulfillment?*

**PRECISELY:** To be precise is to attend very carefully to the details. Precision demands checking and rechecking the information, because much depends on that information. Luke is very aware of the extreme demands of following Jesus, and what is asked of this important official Theophilus.  
*What effect does Luke's precision have on me as you study his gospel?*

**TRANSMITTED:** The author of Luke wants to pass on only that which was essential and accurate.  
*How has my faith been transmitted? Who did I 'catch' it from? What does studying scripture do for my search for truth?*

**ORIGINAL EYEWITNESSES:** By the time this gospel was written many of the original witnesses to the life, death and resurrection had already died. The author of Luke must have had to do considerable work to search out those people still living that could help him compose this gospel.  
*If you I am asked to believe something, does it help me to have someone who was an eyewitness relate what happened? Have I ever been an eye-witness to something so that I later had to testify to someone questioning the truth of the situation? If so, what did it feel like?*

**MINISTERS:** Some of the people the author used in composing the gospels were people who were caring for the new faith communities.  
*What weight do I give to the testimony of someone who is 'walking the walk' over someone who is just 'talking the talk'?*



**THEOPHILUS:** The name Theophilus in Greek means one who loves God. This is the only gospel written for an individual person.

*Am I, like Theophilus, coming to scripture to strengthen my developing faith? Are there people who also provide me with inspiration and insight as I grow in your love of God? Who are they?*

**YOUR EXCELLENCY:** This is a title of someone holding an important position.  
*Do I think the author of this gospel was influenced in any way by having its intended reader be an important person? If so, how?*

**RELIABLE:** Something said to be reliable usually means that you can 'bet your life on it'. Theophilus may be doing just that.

*How do I know when something is reliable? How do I go about checking it out? What am I betting my life on?*

**INSTRUCTION:** Theophilus has had someone guiding him in his faith development. He seems to need a reality check on what he has been told. This gospel was written to respond to this need.  
*How do the gospels help me do my reality checking? Do I go to the scriptures when I have a tough decision to make?*

**RECEIVED:** Theophilus has been given the gift of the faith by the testimony of others. He is open to what they are sharing. He now seems to be open to additional growth.  
*What motivates me to such openness? Who is 'gifting' me with their faith testimonies?*

**GALILEE:** Galilee was the "garden" of Palestine, well-watered and fertile. It was thickly populated and had many good roads leading in every direction.  
*How does locating the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee affect my understanding of God's plan for the people?*

**SPIRIT:** We are introduced to the Spirit as a power from God that moves Jesus to proclaim the good news.  
*Have I ever experienced God's power moving through me? If so, how can the memory of that event help me to understand what is happening here?*

**NAZARETH:** In the early church the followers of Jesus were often called "Nazarenes". Nazareth was Jesus' hometown and Luke is the only gospel that reports the violent rejection of Jesus after this session in the synagogue.  
*How does this knowledge affect my understanding of the rest of the gospel?*

**SABBATH DAY:** Over and over throughout the gospels we hear of Jesus attending the synagogue on the Sabbath. This is the first of six incidents of Jesus' activity on the Sabbath in Luke. Luke wants us to know Jesus takes precedence over the Sabbath.  
*Can I imagine anything of equal importance today that could set in motion such a strong negative response as did this incident?*

**SYNAGOGUE:** The synagogue was the place of study and prayer. It was an important place in the local communities of Judaism.  
*What places serve this same function today?*

**CUSTOM:** Jesus was known to attend the festivals and worship celebrations of his day.  
*What do I think he was thinking and feeling as he attended these events?*



**SCROLL:** The books of Jesus' bible were written on long scrolls of various materials. The Isaiah scroll was very large, and the portion Jesus chose to read was towards the end of the scroll.  
*What do I think was happening with the people as they waited for Jesus to find and then read the parts he chose?*

**ANOINTED ME:** Jesus was proclaiming that the Lord had anointed him. The custom of anointing is ancient in the bible. It was the way that the prophets "selected" the leaders of their day.  
*Why was being in his hometown the worst place to make such a statement?*

**FREEDOM /RECOVERY / RELEASE:** All these words indicate "good news" to people struggling with the oppressions of Rome and temple.  
*What do I need freedom from; recovery from, or release from today that Jesus' words would be a blessing for me?*

**GOOD NEWS:** Good news travels fastest in troubled times.  
*When was the last time I heard "good news"? How fast did it travel?*

**LORD'S FAVOR:** In the "Jubilee year", the people were supposed to be restored to their lands and freed from debts, in other words, get a fresh start in life. Pope Francis has made a year of mercy which can have the same effect.  
*Is there anything in this New Year that I need a fresh start with in order to celebrate a "jubilee"?*

**SAT DOWN:** Sitting down was the posture of the teacher. It is as if now the Q & A time could begin.  
*What questions do I think you might have had for Jesus if I had been there that day?*

**TODAY:** By locating this good news as happening today, Jesus is challenging people to see who he really was. He is doing the same with us today.  
*Am I as dubious today as the people back then were about Jesus and his words?*

**PARALLEL TEXTS:** Lk. 1: 1-4 // Acts 1:1; 1 Cor. 15: 3; Lk. 4: 14 // Mt. 5: 15, 3:16; Lk. 4:16-30// Mt. 13: 53-8; Mk. 6: 1-6; Lk. 4: 18 // Is. 61: 1f, Mt. 3:16;

**OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK:** Neh. 8: 2-10; [Ps. 19: 8-15](#); 1 Cor. 12: 12-30; Lk. 1: 1-4 & 4: 14-21;  
Revised Common Lectionary: Neh. 8: 1-10; [Ps. 19](#); 1 Cor. 12: 12-31; Lk. 4: 14-21;

#### **SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:**

But against those who characterize Luke's writing as a rejection of the Jews in favor of the Gentiles, it is important to note that what is happening in the synagogue in Nazareth is not a rejection of Judaism itself, but rather a selection of one understanding of Judaism in preference to another. Both traditions are part of the heritage. But one is said to have the endorsement of the Spirit. [Fr. Robert Beck](#)

In contrast with the Temple, which as in the hands of the priesthood, especially the high priests, the synagogue was run by the congregation and the community in general....Indeed the whole institution was based on public participation and it was this communal character which gave it its special status. Men, women and children came to the synagogue, but only men would have read and interpreted the Scriptures. ....The Scripture text was read first in Hebrew, and then a translation was provided in the people's vernacular tongue. But it was not a literal translation, it was an interpretation. We are familiar with Jesus reading from Isaiah (Luke 4: 16ff), then laying the scroll aside to interpret its meaning. Pg. 154. Lee. Bernard. The Future Church of 140 BCE.NY. Crossroad Pub. 1995.

"The poor tell us who we are, the prophets tell us who we could be, so we hide the poor, and kill the prophets." -- Phil Berrigan

Galilee : Northern Province of [Israel](#) (50 miles N to S and 30 miles E to W). Galilee was the "garden" of Palestine, well-watered and fertile. It was thickly populated and had many good roads leading in every direction. The main highway was the one that connected Damascus and the [Mediterranean](#) and crossed Galilee, through [Capernaum](#) where [Matthew](#) (Levi) had sat at its custom-house. Galilee was largely influenced by Greek culture, as the [prophet Isaiah](#) had said "Galilee of the gentiles," and many non-Jews lived there.

The Galileans were very bold and rough of whom the historian Josephus said learned "war from infancy," and from Galilee sprang most of the Zealots who were always anxious to drive out the Romans from their land. The people of Galilee were very religious, although the Jews in the south doubted their orthodoxy and despised their northern accent.

- Galilee was the most beautiful and fertile section of Palestine.
- Lots of agriculture (Corn, grapes, olives, and fruits) also flowers
- Animals (domestic and wild), great variety of birds,
- Numerous springs and brooks and green pastures
- A population estimated as high as three million (numerous villages and towns) industries flourished
- According to sources the people were generous, impulsive, simple in manners, full of intense nationalism, free, and independent of the traditionalism of [Judea](#). There were lots of gentiles there.
- Rabbis of [Jerusalem](#) held the Galilean in contempt (manner of speech, colloquialisms, lack of a certain type of culture characteristic of the Jerusalemite). Probably envy since Galilee was so beautiful.
- They were accused of neglecting the traditions and preferred the Haggadah to the Halakkah.
- The Judeans were accustomed to say that no prophet ever arose from Galilee. But such was not the case, since Jonah and probably Nahum were born there and the ministry of both Elijah and Elisha was cast in that section though Elijah was born in Tisbeli of Gilead and Elisha in [Abel-Meholah](#).

Lk. 1.1–4: Prologue. Comprising one Greek sentence, the opening follows classical and Hellenistic conventions (see Josephus, J.W. 1.17; Ag. Ap. 1.1–18). 1: Fulfilled, suggests prophetic fulfillment. 3: Most excellent Theophilus, the address (also Acts 1.1) suggests a patron. Whether Theophilus (a common name meaning “friend of God”) is an actual or ideal reader cannot be determined. Pg. 97. Lk: 4: Instructed, Gk “katēchēthēs,” whence “catechism”; the ideal reader likely has some knowledge of both Jewish Scripture and the story of Jesus. 4.14–15: Teaching in Galilee (Mt 4.12–17; Mk 1.14–15). 14: Spirit, 1.15n. 15: Synagogues, locations of Jewish worship, teaching, and community gathering; see 4.44; see also “The Synagogue,” p. 519. Praised by everyone, initial Jewish reception is unequivocally positive. 4.16–30: Rejection in Nazareth. See Mt 13.53–58; Mk 6.1–6; a scene unique to Luke (perhaps a rewriting of Mk 6.1–6; cf. Mt 13.53–58). See “Jesus’ Synagogue Sermon,” p. 107. 16: As was his custom, referring to v. 15. To read, most people in antiquity were illiterate. 17: Scroll of the prophet Isaiah, whether Nazareth had a separate synagogue building or was prosperous enough to own an Isaiah scroll remains debated. Jesus would be reading the “ha arah”, a passage from the Prophets (“Nevi’im”) complementing the weekly Torah portion. The earliest rabbinic reference to this practice is t. Meg. 4 (3).1; however, both Lk 4 and Acts 13.15 suggest it as might Philo. The text Jesus reads does not appear among the “ha arot.” 18–19: Isa 61.1–2; see also Isa 58.6 and the Jubilee tradition of Lev 25 (see b. Sanh. 102a). For messianic interpretations of Isa 61, see 1QH 18.14; 11QMelch 1.18. Spirit . . . is upon me, 3.22. Release to the captives, ironic, given John’s imprisonment (3.19–20). Luke omits Isaiah’s reference to “the day of vengeance” (61:2). Pgs. 106-107. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#)

Wind is not something we tame or domesticate. It is unpredictable, perhaps soothing, perhaps frightening. This is a quality of the Spirit that leads a friend of mine to speak of the Spirit as the trickster. Pg. 50.

The more we realize the Spirit within us, the more we become who we are, namely, partakers of the divine nature where this “second nature” is existentially the source of actions. Pg. 156.

The Spirit interiorizes what the Word unveils. Pg. 212.

The Holy Spirit is God, but the distinctive character of the Holy Spirit is its “givability.” Pg. 204.

The Spirit of God has been present to creation from the beginning of time. The Spirit is divine energy deep within God’s evolving creation, the source of its creative evolution, its increasing complexity, its growth in consciousness, its unity, its diversity. This creative Spirit breaks through from within creation, not only as the energy of evolution but as the indwelling Spirit within each of us...Pg. 106.

The Holy Spirit is the point of contact between God and ourselves. The Holy Spirit gives us a transfusion of divine life by which we live spiritual lives. Whereas the Holy Spirit is God as Gift, the human spirit is creature as receptor, the vehicle created by God within the human person that is able to receive the Divine Persons. Through the Holy Spirit, God breathes out. Through our spirits, we breathe God in. Pgs. 12-13.

Goergen, Donald. Fire of Love: Encountering the Holy Spirit. NY. Paulist Press. 2006..

He (Johannes Tauler (ca 1300-1361) referred to “this wonderful divine spark deeper inside us and closer to us than we are ourselves,” “the very depths of the soul where God is infinitely closer to the soul and more integral to it than the soul itself,” “the most intimate region of the soul, its most secret and inmost depths, where God is present essentially, actually, and substantially,” and “God Himself firing the spirit with a spark from the divine abyss.” Pg. 9.

Goergen, Donald. Fire of Love: Encountering the Holy Spirit. NY. Paulist Press. 2006..

Once we become increasingly aware of the Holy Spirit, that intense ubiquitous divine presence, our lives begin to change, and so does the way we see the world. Our sense of wonder grows. Our hope becomes more secure. We find ourselves capable of loving in ways unimagined. As the prophet Isaiah instructs us, we widen the space of our tents. (Isa 54:2). We deepen and widen our vision. Pg. vi. Goergen, Donald. Fire of Love: Encountering the Holy Spirit. NY. Paulist Press. 2006..

When you feel very upset and angry, your fears prompt you to lash out, to condemn or to take revenge...Learn to wait and to listen from the communion that you experience with God. learn to become like the God who loves you with all your darkness and all your radiant beauty. Henri Nouwen

In fact, the Kingdom of Heaven is not an outer kingdom at all, Jesus was very specific about this, insisting: "My Kingdom is not of their world." It is not about physical buildings and institutional agendas but about a *different level of consciousness*, about consciousness transformed by awakening. It is the new arising that comes into play when the gentle light of the Holy Spirit illuminates the inner aliveness within the outer form, revealing the Body of Christ at the heart of all things. Pg. 177.

Bourgeault, Cynthia [The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three](#). Shambhala Pub, In. Boulder, Co 2013

Synagogue: Study of the Torah which was seen as the most intense presence of God in the world, and study of it was an act of communion with the Deity. It was where communal meals for the Sabbath and holidays were held. It served as a general assembly hall, housed the local law courts and served as a repository for communal funds. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. it was where the daily prayers that were required were said.

Like many in the prophetic tradition, Jesus preached God's imminent approach (hanan) in Heseb we met (Mk. 1:1-51 Lk. 4: 14-21), and he called upon his listeners to rely on it totally (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 13: 44-45). This brings us back to the scriptural stories of People who believed him and through their faith were opened to a power greater than mental and physical illnesses (that is, they were healed of physical and mental affliction), a power greater than death itself.

Peters, Dr. Carmichael. *A Gadamerian Reading of Karl Rahner's Theology of Grace and Freedom*. NY. Catholic Scholars Press. 2000

#### Jesus' Response to Vengeful Punishment

Question: What is your basis for saying that changing our vengeful image of God was the core of Jesus' mission?

Scripture scholars agree that in Luke 4:14-19, Jesus in the Nazareth synagogue proclaimed his own mission using the words of Isaiah 61:1-2. But why, after he proclaimed his mission, was the whole audience filled with indignation to the point of wanting to hurl Jesus over the edge of the mountain (Lk. 4:30)? The Jewish listeners wanted the Messiah to be vengeful to the Romans, to the Sidonians, to the Syrians—to all but themselves. But in quoting Isaiah, Jesus skipped the sentence in 61:2 which speaks of God's vengeance on enemies, and instead declared that God's "favor" rested on all—Romans, Sidonians and Syrians alike (Lk. 4:26-27). Jesus angered his Jewish listeners because he was proclaiming the end of vengeful punishment and the reign of a Messiah whose "favor" shines on the just and the unjust. As Robert Jewett explains, by skipping the sentence regarding God's vengeance and thus placing himself in opposition to the vengeance tradition, Jesus violated the literal interpretation of scripture prevalent in his time.

Linn, Dennis, et al. *Good Goats*. Mahwah, NY. Paulist Press. 1994. Pg. 57.

Jesus does an unforgivable thing in taking parts of a text and making a new teaching out of the parts. He combined Is. 61: 1a,b, and d with 58:6d and 61:2a. This angers the people to the point of wanting to destroy him. Many feel that Luke has shaped his material in order to be inclusive of everyone. Meier, John P. *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. NY. Doubleday. 1991. Pages 270 & 313.

Scripture is not revelation, it attests to revelation. It is witness-to-revelation. God is at work here only in an indirect and hidden fashion. Only in faith is the kerygma experienced as truly God's own Word to humanity. (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13).

Kung, Hans. *Theology for the Third Millennium: An Ecumenical View*. NY. Doubleday. 1987. Pg. 56.

Much is given to the beginning of Luke's gospel in Fr. Robert Beck's book [Jesus and His Enemies](#) on Pgs. 126-129.

The role of the prophet is to keep people free for God. But at the same time it's the responsibility of the prophet to keep God free for people. Pg. 19. Rohr, Richard. [Simplicity: the Art of Living](#). NY. Crossroad. 1992.

A teacher ought to be a stranger to the desire for domination, vainglory, and pride. A teacher should not be fooled by flattery, nor be blinded by gifts, conquered by the stomach, nor dominated by anger. A teacher should be patient, gentle and humble as far as possible; successfully tested and without partisanship, full of concern, and a lover of souls. Amma Theodora

"You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope." --Thomas Merton

#### **SUGGESTED READINGS:**

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle C 2012*. Pgs. 41-45.

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2010*. Pgs. 32-35.

Beck, Robert. *Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2007*. Pgs. 41-45