



Rev. Glen McCrainie
Third Sunday of the Epiphany – Luke 4:14-21
24 January 2010

Some of us are from another city or state. We are transplants. We are not natives. Even if we live here fifty years, we will still not be considered a native. Sometimes we go back to our home towns to visit family members or attend special events such as funerals, weddings, graduations, or birthdays. Some have never moved from this area and have lived most of their lives in this local area. A common thread which binds us together is we have found we cannot ever go back. We are unable to go back to our native states and resume where we once were in our lives or return to an earlier period of our lives.

We may have fond memories of our past especially when we were growing *up*. In many ways those were carefree days. None of life's pressures impacted upon us. It was great to be young. It was great to be pain free. It was great not to have to spend money on prescription drugs, wait in line to pick up prescriptions or twiddle our thumbs in a doctor's office. It was great not to have aching bones or joints. It was great to have many choices of what we wanted to do in life. There was no concept of the reality of death. The military know this is why young people make the best soldiers. They think that they will not be killed in battle.

In our hearts while we may yearn to return to those early days or places, we know that we cannot go back. We may yearn, plan, or talk about a move back to our hometowns, but we know we cannot go back and recapture the joy of those earlier days of our youth.

Still this universal yearning happens every year when freshmen college students come home for the Christmas holidays. They may have a sudden sense that something has changed. Home is not the same as when they left four months earlier. Neither life nor time has stood still at the old home place while they were away. Life has moved on without them. Old classmates have scattered or have other interests. They have a harsh awareness they cannot go back to the time of high school days.

Two days after high school graduation, I was in the navy and shipped off to boot camp. After nine weeks of a joyful vacation at recruit training in Great Lakes, Illinois I came home on boot leave. Everything had changed. I would walk down my hometown in my white navy uniform, but things had changed for there was a feeling nothing was the same. I was no longer a high school student, I no longer had my after school job, my classmates had moved on and scattered. I don't even think my family enjoyed having me home for I had changed the family routine and dynamics which had developed when I left for boot camp. Now that is a rude awakening. It was one strange feeling. The world I had lived in and grown up in had moved on and changed without me. Has that ever happened to you? People and events did not stand still while you were gone.

It happened to Jesus in today's scripture. Jesus was a local citizen of Nazareth. He was raised there in his father's shop learning a trade. People in the town knew him as Mary and Joseph's oldest son. After a period of time Mary and Joseph's boy grows up. Then one day as an adult, Jesus leaves Nazareth. He travels several days to the banks of the Jordan River. That is a short distance on a map, yet it was a different environment and world than the sleepy little village of Nazareth.

It is on the banks of the Jordan River that Jesus meets his cousin John who was baptizing people. Jesus is also baptized and when he comes out of the river, he is led by the Holy Spirit out into the desert for forty days on a personal soul searching venture. He is without food. He is tempted by the devil as to whom he will serve. Would He give into the tempting offerings of the devil or would Jesus be faithful to the task God had placed him on earth to fulfill?

These experiences of baptism and forty days of temptations and fasting shaped and changed Jesus while he was a way from Nazareth. When he returned to his hometown, Jesus was not the same person as the one who left. He was returning a changed person. He was now more than just Joseph's son. It states Jesus was filled with the power of the spirit. When you are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, then you are not the same person. If you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you cannot be the same person. You are not the same person, by the miracle and actions of God. You have been changed. You cannot go back. You can never return. Your world is not the same. You cannot be the same for you have moved way beyond what you once were. As Thomas Wolfe, the famous author stated, "You can't go home again." Anyone touched by God cannot be the same person. You can't go home again. You have moved on. You have entered new and exciting territory. You need to contact the post office for your address has changed. Your email address has changed. Your email address is no longer dot com for it is now dot God.

The power that was in Jesus was so strong when he walked the dusty roads of Israel people knew the Son of God was passing their way. Word of mouth traveled quickly ahead of him as he continued his journey back to his home town. The telegraph system of that first century was working well and at full speed. Word of mouth traveled faster than Jesus was walking. When He again walked the small Nazareth's streets he was back home physically but he was not the same person. Jesus was soon to discover that he could not go back. The calling of God had been placed upon his shoulders.

Jesus goes into the local synagogue as was his custom. The synagogue was a place of learning and teaching. No animal sacrifices took place nor were there any priests. There were rabbis who were teachers of the law, but not holy people as priests. It was a gathering place for the men to gather and learn the scriptures and share ideas or interpretations of the Torah. The teacher of the day would be seated and the men would stand. When the scroll or Torah was read, everyone was standing. Jesus read from Isaiah 61.

It is in the reading that Jesus states why he came:

- (1) He came to bind up the broken hearted;
- (2) To proclaim the word of god;
- (3) To comfort the people; and
- (4) To provide.

Jesus came to provide hope. Hope for the oppressed, the blind and those in captivity.

Bishop Tutu of South Africa was asked how he endured living in the country of South Africa as a second class citizen and being in prison because he was black. Bishop Tutu stated: "A Christian is a prisoner of hope." We are set free because we are a prisoner of hope. Jesus was bringing those words of hope to people. The people are free when they are a prisoner of hope.

The election season will soon be upon us. Soon the airwaves will be crowded with the promises of politicians. Listen to the rhetoric and the statements of those seeking office. You will hear over and over again their promises. "I will put a chicken in every pot". "I will balance the budget." "I will provide medical care for all people." "I will not raise taxes." "I will represent the people." Heard those words before? You will hear them again. These are words spoken by sinful men just as all of us are sinful people. The only promise that I have ever heard that was and will be fulfilled was not from the mouth of a politician, but was from the mouth of our Lord. I am still looking for my chicken in the pot, a balanced budget, lower taxes, and someone who will represent me and not themselves. Yet, I am no longer waiting for the Messiah to come. I know He is real for I have celebrated His birthday. As one poem stated:

*I know not how that Bethlehem babe, could in the godhead be,
I only know the manger child, has brought God's life to me.*

Jesus could not go back. The people of Nazareth would not listen to Mary and Joseph's boy. His mission in life was now forever changed. The people could not accept that he had changed. They rejected him. It took a woman at a well in the country of Samaria to listen to Jesus. It took a woman at the well in the country of Samaria to run and tell others to, "Come and listen for I have found the Messiah. He is now in our midst."

Paul Harvey told the story of him and his wife visiting a small church while on vacation. He said that the church they attend at home was large, but this was a small church. He said the crowd was small, the music was bad, and the minister seemed to have little enthusiasm. At the end of the service, there was an altar call. Paul Harvey said that in his church, they did not have an altar call. He stated that at once he suddenly felt a sense of peace. His wife had this same experience. It was due to the biblically based words that the minister used. Paul Harvey said that he and his wife were lifted out of their seats and went to the altar. When they left the church, they left with an inner warmth and their lives were blessed. They had heard the words of Jesus being spoken in their hearts. Mary and Joseph's little boy living in Nazareth had become a man who outgrew the small little town of Nazareth to become the savior of the world speaking to people's hearts through the centuries.

Isn't it amazing that there are churches who sing to the sound of banjos and there are churches whose paid musicians play Bach during the worship service? All of these churches in this wide range of worship experiences and different ministers in the pulpit on a Sunday morning are united for all have heard the words and promises of Jesus being spoken. Nope, the boy of Nazareth did not or could not go back. He had better and more exciting experiences ahead.

This past week our nation celebrated the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. When we look back to those old black and white films, the words that he spoke do not seem radical. He said: "We are all God's children". For these words he was assassinated.

Jesus said, "I have come to fulfill the scriptures." For this he was crucified. Yet, when we hear and respond to the words of Jesus spoken in a synagogue in a small Jewish village, we are then prisoners of hope, bound up knowing that Christ will deliver us. Knowing our wounds and scars will be healed.