

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

“The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.”

This is it.

The climax.

The moment of truth.

OK Jesus, what ya' gonna do?

This story of Jesus returning to his home town

has been moved by Luke to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

When this vignette appears in the other Gospels, it appears later in the story.

Luke uses this story to foreshadow the whole ministry of Christ.

We only heard the beginning of the story this morning,

but it goes on for another nine verses

in which the people in the synagogue

are initially amazed by the good news that Jesus brings,

but then become enraged and try to kill him

by throwing him off a nearby cliff

and Jesus then passes among them and goes away.

Have you heard that story somewhere before?

The story turns when for some reason

the initially friendly crowd turns hostile.

Why?

What do you think it is about the message that Jesus brings

that so enrages the people of Nazareth?

Actually it's pretty simple, really,

and the truth is

we don't like hearing it today any more than they did back then.

What he tells them is essentially, it's not about you.

The good news that Jesus brings is for all people not just the Jews.

And for that matter, not just for Christians either.

The good news that Jesus brings isn't something we get to keep
or something we even *can* keep to ourselves.

More than anything else it compels us to action;

Action beyond ourselves.

The good news of Christ is about breaking down walls,

pushing back boundaries,

and opening doors.

Moving out of our own comfort zones.

I remember when I was in preaching class at seminary,

our class was told to keep in mind

that the role of a good preacher

was to comfort the afflicted,

and afflict the comfortable.

When Jesus came to the synagogue that morning

his reputation preceded him,

he was, if you will, already "Nazareth's greatest son."

After he says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,"

the people are amazed and speak well of him and say,

"Is this not Joseph's son?"

At first blush this phrase is often interpreted as a statement of incredulity,

something like, "who does he think he is?"

but I think a closer interpretation might be something more like,

"That's our boy; Isn't that just like a son of Joseph?"

In short, they're not mad yet.

They're still comfortable.

And Jesus moves right away to break that comfortable assumption.

He pushes the point -- I'm not here to make *your* life easier.

It's not about *you*.

And that's when they get mad and try to throw him off a cliff.

Luke puts this story early in his Gospel

because he wants *us* to get the message early.

Luke knows that all too often,

the initial response of people to the good news

becomes one of possession and protection.

My congregation, my church, my call, my faith.

Luke has Jesus gently reminding us right off the bat,

that it's not about us.

We are the comfortable ones.

Reminds us that our focus is really about the poor, and the captives,
the blind and the oppressed.

It's about them and what they need from us.

We started this season of Epiphany by renewing our baptismal vows.

In that act we rededicated ourselves to the mission and ministry of Christ's church.

Reminded ourselves of this important truth;

that we are not God, we follow God;

that it's not about us, and our will,

it's about God and God's will for us;

that we are only members of the body of Christ.

Members one of another.

As Paul says, "For in the one Spirit we are baptized into the one body"

Next week is our annual meeting.

We will be gathering to start a new era for St. Christopher's;

to look back at where we have come from;

and to look ahead to where we are going.

And we will begin changing.

I know nobody likes to hear the word change,

and I hope by saying it I am not going to be run out of town on a rail,
or thrown off a cliff.

Yes, I know this is my last Sunday,

but believe me, there are many ways to leave a church
and not all of them are enjoyable.

It is not my intent to scare anyone,

but I do need to tell the truth.

We will be changing.

I will be leaving and Eric will be returning.

Some members of the Vestry will be retiring,

Some members of the parish will be elected to replace them
and we will be approving a new Warden.

In this our own little incarnation of the body of Christ,

the conformation of the body will change.

What once was known and comfortable

will become unpredictable and mysterious.

It will be a time of growth and change.

It will be uncomfortable...for a while.

But if we do it right,

Then we know it comes from God,

and it will be good.

And so our job

is to be sure that we will do it right;

to discern what is God's will for us

and to use our will to make it happen.

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it;

if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

Not tomorrow or next week or next year

but now!

In the week ahead I ask you to pray about our own transition of power.

Pray that those retiring may leave with a sense of accomplishment,
and not just exhaustion.

Pray that those elected to new positions may come with a deep awareness
of the gifts that God has given them for the task ahead,
and not only a sense of dread
over the enormity of the task before them.

Pray that the whole congregation may constantly remember
that though we are individually members of the body of Christ,
and all have important pieces of the mission to do,
the entirety of the mission is in God's hands,

And so we need only work, and not worry.

We need only trust in God and pray for strength.

Like Paul, and Abraham, and so many followers of God before me,

I now go on to a new place, a place that God will show me.

I leave behind a community of love,
a community prepared for the work ahead.

I thank you deeply for the opportunity to share ministry with you,
and the love and support you have so graciously and generously given me.

Our time together has been a fruitful one,
and one for which I am very grateful to God.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us,
because the Lord has anointed us to bring good news to the poor.

The Lord has sent us to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Amen.