

Due to Covid, there will not be any in-person worship for the next few Sundays  
Our goal is to reopen February 13, 2022 if the Covid numbers have improved.

**JANUARY 30, 2022**  
**Fourth Sunday after epiphany**



**St. John United Church of Christ**  
**10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL**  
**397-6323**

**Rev. Rosemary Captain**  
**Liturgy – Rev. Lavon Bayler**  
**Organist/Pianist – Sharon Banjavcic**

Jeremiah 1:4-10 Psalm 71:1-6  
1 Corinthians 13:1-13 Luke 4:21-30

**CALL TO WORSHIP:** Based on readings.  
Come, people of God, to the one in whom we trust.

Praise God who delivers and rescues us.  
**God is our rock of refuge, our strong fortress.**  
**God saves us amid wickedness and cruelty.**

Hope in God, who has created you.  
Open yourself to the one who knows you well.  
**God accepts us, even when people do not.**  
**God affirms us, even when we fail.**

Our God gives us tasks to do and strength to do them. God's Word of love is ours to proclaim.

**We have come to embrace the mysteries of our faith.**

**We are here to worship the God who empowers us.**

**INVOCATION:** God of love, in whose name we have been consecrated for discipleship and service, encounter us in this hour, that we may grow in knowledge and actions. Disturb our certainties so we will open to new insights. Upset our priorities to make room for faith, hope, and love. Expand our horizons to encompass ideas we have not entertained before. Open our hearts to people we have failed to welcome into our midst. Perfect among us that childlike trust that allows change to transform us in the presence of your love. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Let us give God our thanks and praise.*

**GLORIA PATRI: Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, Three- in-One; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.**

**SCRIPTURE AND MESSAGE:**

Today I'm going to do things a little differently. To better understand our scripture text and message, I will do them together and comment as we go.

**GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 4:14-30**

**MESSAGE: "The Tale of Two Responses – Part 2"**

Let's review where we have been through the lectionary on our journey to walk with Jesus through the Gospel of Luke: the birth, the shepherds, the wisemen. We met John the Baptist and we witnessed the baptism of Jesus and we heard the voice of God. Jesus' ministry began with the wedding at Cana, although that story was actually in the Gospel of John.

Jesus began his ministry in Galilee. Galilee was an area in the north of Palestine about 50 miles by 25 miles. The name itself means a circle and comes from the Hebrew word *Galil*, because it was encircled by non-Jewish nations.

The area was densely populated with 204 villages or towns, none with a population less than 15,000.

Jesus began in the synagogue which was the real center of religious life in Palestine. The synagogue service consisted of three parts; prayer, the reading of scripture, and the teaching part. In the synagogue there was no professional ministry nor any one person to give the address; the synagogue assistant would invite any distinguished person present to speak, and discussion and talk would follow. When reading the scroll, the person stood. When teaching, the person sat. According to verses Luke 4:14-15, Jesus was well received when he taught in the synagogues in Galilee. **This was response #1.** When Jesus spoke, the people listened. They were impressed by his knowledge and his interpretations of the Torah.

And then Jesus went home to Nazareth, where he had been raised. **Luke 4:16-21.** Jesus attended service in the synagogue and read from the scroll of Isaiah. (verses 18-19) "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor; to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

(verses 20 – 21) Jesus gave the scroll back to the synagogue assistant and sat down, which means Jesus was ready for discussion on the text. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. He began to explain to them,

“Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it.” ***(A rather bold statement, don’t you think? Yet the gracious words of Jesus impressed those in attendance. So far, so good. Then Jesus continued. Verses 23-24.)***

“Undoubtedly, you will quote this saying to me: Doctor, heal yourself. Do here in your hometown what we’ve heard you did in Capernaum. I assure you that no prophet is welcome in the prophet’s hometown.” ***(It sounds to me like Jesus is going to lay some truth on them; truth they do not want to hear.)***

***(I did not understand the truths Jesus says next in verses 25–27. The events he describes happened hundreds of years before his birth, but all Jewish people knew these stories. However, we don’t “get it”. What does Jesus remind them of that makes the people want to throw Jesus off a cliff? First they loved him [Response #1] and now they want to kill him [Response #2]. What does Jesus say that could cause such a dramatic shift? Let’s see if we can figure it out.)***

Verses 25-27, Jesus continues, “And I can assure you that there were many widows in Israel during Elijah’s time, when it didn’t rain for three and half years and there was a great food shortage in the land. Yet Elijah was sent to none of them but only to a widow in the city of Zarephath in the region of Sidon. There were also many persons with skin diseases in Israel during the time of the prophet Elisha, but none of them were cleansed. Instead, Naaman the Syrian was cleansed.”

***(I don’t know about you, but I still didn’t understand why those words angered the listeners so much. Do you? Let’s go to my present favorite Bible scholar, William Barclay, to help us understand.***

He writes, “What angered the people was the apparent compliment that Jesus paid to Gentiles. ***(All the people Jesus mentioned were Gentiles being helped by Jewish prophets.)*** “The Jews were so sure that they were God’s people that they tended to look down on all others. Some believed that ‘God had created the Gentiles to be fuel for the fires of hell.’ And here was this young Jesus, in his hometown and well known, preaching as if the Gentiles were specially favored by God. It was beginning to dawn upon the listeners that there were things in the new message the like of which they had never dreamed.”

***(So, what do we think about this truth that Jesus pointed out to them? Once I understood what Jesus said, I couldn't help but think about our world today. What images come to your mind?)***

The editor/publisher of "Christian Century" magazine, Peter W. Marty, wrote an article for the January 26 issue called "White Fear". "I'm troubled by the sharp rise of White grievance and resentment in America." Marty pointed out that many people are worried that America is losing its whiteness." Tony Morrison once referred to as "the horror of lost status." As immigrant and ethnic minority populations grow and White communities gradually lose their numerical advantage, a sense of White dominance begins to disappear.

Just as the Jews felt they were the favored race, we can see many examples of this in our world today. According to Peter Marty, "it's no easy task to propose a change of mind to aggrieved White folks. What seems to me (Marty) like obvious Christian impulses for inspiring a more gracious embrace of human diversity end up having little impact on resentment-filled White people – many of whom consider themselves thoroughly Christian. . . . we might call it a distorted worldview."

***(I believe you and I are being challenged to change our world view of all peoples, cultures, history, and religions. As written by author Barbara Brown Taylor in her book "Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others" she states that "no one has custody of God." God belongs to everyone, whether we like it or not. God shares we all of us and we should do the same.)*** Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:** Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer.

Creator of all of us, you teach us to love others, but we seem to have a problem considering everyone who doesn't look like us as "other". Everyone wants to feel that they are "special" in God's eyes and we are because God cares for everybody, not just some, not just a few, but all of God's creations, which includes everyone and everybody. We don't know how, but we're not God. Have mercy on us.

When we exclude others, we miss the wonderful opportunity to learn more, care more, and love more.

Today we pray for everyone, friends we have and friends we haven't met yet. We pray for all those on our prayer list and we pray for ourselves who are craving to be closer to God in every way we can.

**THE LORD'S PRAYER:**

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

**INVITATION TO SHARE:** Thank you for continuing your support of your church. Please mail or drop off your offerings during this time we are not together.

(Judy has giving statements for everyone. You are welcome to drop by to pick it up or ask Judy to mail it to you.)

**PRAYER OF DEDICATION:** With awe and wonder before you, O God, we dare to enlist all our efforts toward the realization of your realm. Where there is injustice, we would champion those oppressed and misunderstood. When some feel rejected, we reach out to accept them in Christ's name. May these offerings preach and teach and heal. Amen.

**COMMISSION AND BLESSING:**

Go forth with faith to move mountains.  
Reach out with love that transforms the world.

**Love is patient and kind, not jealous or boastful.**

**Love rejoices in all that is right, not in wrong.**

Let the Scripture be fulfilled by your faithfulness.

Let the Word take flesh in all you do.

**Love bears, believes, hopes, and endures.**

**We participate in the love of God that never ends.**

God promises to be our rock and our refuge.

God is ever with us to deliver us.

**God's Word will be in our mouths.**

**God's love will warm our spirits. Amen.**

**PRAYER LIST:** Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, Agnes Doctolero, David Seneczyn, Cathy Ganschinetz, Warren Neff, Jack Harris, Lynn Hursey, Robert Uhrig, Carol White, Dennis Franklin, John Biehl, Cheri Schutzenhofer.