

*14Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. 15He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. 16When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 18“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, 19to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” 20And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Earlier this week I was praying. I remembered some in this community who face surgery, and others who are fighting illness. I prayed for members of my family, for survivors of the earthquake in Japan. Suddenly I was startled with the realization that I had not been praying for me. It seemed for a long time I had not been praying for me. My life I will take care of. But since I can't take care of the others, God will have to watch out for them.

Joanne Polack shared an article with me. One person told about a distinction that needs to be made. If you are tied down to the railroad track and a train is coming, pray for release. But if you are lying on the track and the train is coming and you are not tied, don't pray, just get up off the track.

I think I have been acting as if I am never tied to the track, so why call on God. It is up to me.

I imagine that most of you sense how foolish my thinking has been. You know that life is a daily battle and that as Paul tells us we are not contending only against flesh and blood, but against darker spiritual forces in us and in the world. The good that I want to do, I do not do but I do the very thing I hate. Paul wrote those words a long time ago, and they are still true in me.

Yet the power to do what is right seems so close. If I just try a little harder, I won't lose my temper this time. I won't say things that hurt people around me. If I just try a little harder I won't be so self-centered, only interested in me.

Some people who have been chained to abusive drinking of alcohol, or destructive eating patterns, or physically abusive responses to stress have learned a most important

confession. I am powerless over alcohol, or chocolate candy, or explosions of anger. Their freedom from what binds them begins with this confession. I am powerless. Then they learn to trust in a higher power.

We gather here because we know the name of that higher power, the highest of all powers, Jesus Christ. Today in our gospel reading we see him in the synagogue of his home town.

He stood before all his friends and neighbors and read these words from Isaiah: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

*And then he said to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

But as we will read in the gospel for next week, they thought Jesus words were for someone else, for they did not think themselves to be poor, or blind or captives or oppressed. They rejected Jesus and he left them there, and went to others.

There is a trap for us as we live our lives in the church. We may think that we are no longer poor in faith, no longer blind, no longer captives, no longer oppressed. We believe in Jesus, now we will help others. We may think it is everyone else who is bound to those railroad tracks, but not me. We are so familiar with Jesus, that we may no longer see him as the one who can free us today. He has been around all along, and I have been around him. But being around is not the same as hearing.

Sometimes, being in the church is like playing the TV in the background all day. You've been in homes where that happens. The sound and picture are always there, yet no one is paying any attention.

Our Lord Jesus is always in the background here; his name repeatedly spoken. His story is told again and again.

Today the promise of freedom is fulfilled in our hearing. We are powerless over so many pieces of our lives but Jesus is powerful. He who broke even the chains of death is able to break every cord that binds you.

Let go of your power, trust in his.

When your faith is in him, and no longer in you, something astounding happens. Jesus works through you. You become his love, his forgiveness, his embrace for your neighbor.

When you are in Christ through faith in him, you are a part of his body, his presence in this world today.

For he comes to free you, and all your neighbors. Amen.