

## **“Fulfillment Center”**

Luke 4:14-21; I Corinthians 12:12-31a – Rev. Rebecca Littlejohn  
Vista La Mesa Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), La Mesa, California – January 26, 2025

*Holy God, bless the speaking and the hearing of these words, that we might receive your Spirit and fulfill your good news, each in our own way. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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It's a funny week for me to preach about a scripture involving someone's return to their hometown, when I've only just gotten back from mine. It's interesting how a place can stay so much the same while also changing in various ways. It made me wonder if the people who've lived there all this time miss the trees that aren't there anymore that my eyes are still surprised to notice are gone. But it's actually not my hometown that I want to talk about today, but another place where I lived for quite a while.

When I first moved to Alabama, it was usually easiest to fly out of the Atlanta airport. That changed eventually, as the road down from the highway to the airport got developed and went from having 1 or 2 stoplights to 12 or so. But one of the things I remember the most about that road is that it was the first place I ever saw a sign for a “Fulfillment Center.” Amazon was still just getting started on its path to world domination back then, so most people still called warehouses warehouses. So I was a bit amused when I saw that sign. But also, it rubs me the wrong way when industries claim words that exaggerate and embellish what they are doing. Filling an order is one thing; fulfillment is whole other order of satisfaction, and I refuse to

believe it's one that Amazon can achieve. Nevertheless, there was the sign, and I guess we've probably all gotten used to them claiming the phrase by now. But that doesn't mean we can't steal it back!

The context in which this word comes up in our scriptures, of course, has nothing to do with commerce. Jesus has come home and showed up at the local synagogue. He gets to read the scriptures and finds this passage from Isaiah. And then he sits down and tells them all that the scripture has been fulfilled in their hearing. Can you imagine what they were thinking? Did they look around to see if any of their blind neighbors were suddenly able to see? What would fulfillment of this scripture look like?

It is important to carefully hear the words that Luke has Jesus "reading" from Isaiah. They are actually from two different places in Isaiah, so this story is likely more symbolic than a literal history, like most of the gospel. But the verses don't talk about captives being released and the blind seeing right then. It seems that what Jesus is claiming as fulfillment is him receiving his call to embark upon that journey of proclamation and liberation. It's his opening address, when he's laying out what he's going to do and putting it in the context of what God has been doing all along. It's going to be good news for the poor. It's going to be liberation for prisoners. It's going to be healing and wholeness and freedom. Jesus is here to hurry along the fulfillment of God's desires for shalom, just and merciful peace for all. It's a tall order.

It's important to remember how the weight of those words would have landed. Times were hard. Jesus' people were living under occupation. There were others who were trying to lead rebellions. They may have even been in the hill country surround Nazareth. But for someone to show up in this boondocks town and simply announce the year of the Lord's favor must have seemed highly unlikely. If you're going to do that, shouldn't you go to the capital? Why here? Why now? Why you? It's as likely as the Messiah being born in a barn and attended by shepherds and foreigners.

What does fulfillment look like in hard times? What does it mean to work toward fulfillment of God's desires for shalom in the midst of hard, even bewildering times? There are many of us who have been grappling with these questions recently, I imagine. What does fulfillment look like for us? How do we follow Jesus faithfully when it seems like there is no good news and oppression is on the rise? Well, our first clue is right here in this story. If we want to follow Jesus, let's look to his example. He was just getting started, and what did he do? He turned to scripture. He looked into the word of God and found his call: good news for the poor, release for the captives, sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed. If we want to know what to do, if we want to be reminded of who and whose we are, we also must look to scripture for guidance. There we will be grounded in love and wisdom, in compassion and mercy, in generosity and courage. These are the guiding lights our faith offers us, if we are humble enough to ask. These are the values that must shape our actions, our choices, our interactions with one another and everyone we meet.

And what happens when the Spirit pours out this call upon the gathered body? For that, we turn to the words Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. They, too, had their challenges. They were not a particularly unified community. They did not have uniform experiences of life. But they had been called together in the name of Christ Jesus. And Paul saw in their diversity the glory of Christ. When the Spirit is poured forth, he told them, it doesn't mean you will all respond the same way, doing the exact same things. That's not how the Body of Christ works.

And the same is true for us. When the Spirit pours forth upon us, even in these bewildering times, we will not all respond the same way. Each of us will find different ways to contribute, different ways of expressing the compassion and mercy of God for our neighbors and our world. Many gifts, one Spirit of Love. The fact that we may all be doing different things does not mean we aren't engaged in the same work though. It is all the fulfillment of the ministry of Christ Jesus, as long as we are truly listening to the Spirit moving in our midst and in our hearts. It is in fulfilling this call of the gospel that our souls find their true fulfillment, more satisfying than any same-day delivery that comes on a truck.

Each of us will find our own place, our own way of carrying out the work of Christ. Some will preach, some will encourage, some will prepare meals, some will fix leaky faucets. Some will visit the sick, some will comfort the bereaved, some will call their elected officials, some will profess ignorance when authorities come looking for their vulnerable neighbors. Some will gum up the gears of oppression, while others

will tend to those crushed beneath them. Some will pray for liberation and others may fund it. Some will sing songs to remind us of God's vision of wholeness for our world. Some will take out the trash and the recycling and the compost. Some will hold the hands of the dying, while others work to prevent premature deaths. Many gifts, one Spirit of Love.

We don't need to worry about someone living out their faith differently than we are. We don't need to judge how someone else carries out the call to compassion and mercy. Neither do we need to worry that we should be doing what someone else is. The fulfillment Paul speaks to in First Corinthians 12 recognizes the beautiful diversity of the Body of Christ, the truth of the Incarnation that each one of us is precious and beloved, and each one of us has our own particular path for following Jesus. Together, as we receive the Spirit in community, we show the world what it means to fulfill the call of God. May it be so. Hallelujah and Amen.