

“What Does Christ Do?”

I knew a guy who worked in a factory all of his life. The company made industrial switches and in his job this man stood at a workstation and delicately dropped temperature sensitive liquid into small copper tubes that were then inserted into industrial thermostats. He did this work for 8 hours a day for 40 years. Over time many manufacturing jobs have become automated but there is still work that requires human hands to perform specific and repetitive tasks. The work is to do the same thing over and over and over again. While we are grateful for those who do what needs to be done, there are not many of us who would relish a job that repeats the same action in a sort of mindless loop. And yet, before we come down too hard on what sounds boring and routine, let's recognize that for most of us most of life is filled with repeating patterns. We tend to move about in the same circles. We have “go to” foods and our usual restaurants. We shop and get gas and do our banking in the same places. We have morning routines and night time routines, and there are many daily tasks that suggest we often move through life as if on autopilot. There's no judgement here just the recognition that life sometimes feels routine. This patterned way of living can spill over into our religious lives. For most of us, most of the time, our experience of church involves well practiced patterns. Those who keep track of this kind of data say that while our patterns of worship attendance have changed over time (regular attendance in church used to mean nearly every Sunday but now it means at least once a month) our connection to church still involves well practiced routines. This brings to mind what happened last Sunday morning when the Level 3 Snow Emergency in Delaware County meant we had to cancel church. I didn't know what to do with myself. Sunday morning without church? It just didn't feel right. Today is a Family Worship Sunday, and we welcome children into the sanctuary who are joining their families for worship. Kids love snow days. Kids joyfully welcome the interruption to the routine of going to school every day. “Bad weather?” say the kids. “Bring it on.” But, a snow day from church? Last week it was like I was in some other universe. Everything just felt “off.” The point is, at one level or another, our experience of religious life follows well practiced patterns and we do not expect or desire those patterns to be interrupted. It was the same in the time of Jesus. The religious life of the Hebrew people centered on traditions and practices that were well worn and well known. Today's gospel story begins in the expected way. It was the sabbath and it was the hometown synagogue, and what happened there, at least at the start of the story, was all about the routine.

In the way we come into the sanctuary on Sunday having a pretty good idea what to expect, so the congregation in Nazareth gathered that day settling into the usual pattern of their worship and teaching. Jesus was the rabbi in residence that day. We know he was one of them. Jesus grew up in Nazareth. He was the son of Mary and Joseph, and everybody knew that family. I'm sure Jesus was a shining star in religious school and so, it promised to be a good sabbath day whenever Jesus was the one to teach and preach from the sacred scriptures. He was good at it. They liked his sermons, and the people must have felt good about their decision to attend synagogue that sabbath morning. This was going to pay off. Jesus was sitting in the teacher's seat and, so they thought, their commitment to be there that day was going to be worth it. I get the sense the gospel writer, Luke, wants us to feel how usual and routine everything was that day, until God, whose presence through the Holy Spirit filled Jesus and flowed through him, took hold of the people's routine faith and turned everything upside down. Just when the congregation had settled into their familiar pattern of teaching and worship Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, rattled their world.

What was so different that day? What was it that shook things up and changed an otherwise normal Sabbath morning into an earth shattering event? We know what happened. It's not a mystery to us. Luke says it and we've made mention of it today. It was the Holy Spirit, which is one of the ways we talk about the activity of God. That day it was the Holy Spirit filling and flowing through Jesus, shaping his destiny and empowering him for his mission. Jesus did more than just read the scripture that day. Jesus did more than follow the familiar pattern of every other rabbi as he unrolled the scroll, recited the passage and then sat down in the teaching chair to comment on what had been read. With a Spirit filled Jesus it's never business as usual. That day the truth and power of God's Word came to life in him. It was the Holy Spirit working in Jesus and the result of that spirit filled presence revealed what he was to do. Jesus' purpose, his calling, his response to God came together in one glorious and history changing moment, as he read from the Book of Isaiah and then said, “Today this reading has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21) Church, this must not escape our understanding this morning. What was read, what was heard, became real in Jesus. When the activity of God and the power of the Holy Spirit work on us the routine of life becomes filled with a creative, healing, loving and gracious power. Synagogue isn't just synagogue and church isn't just church. God is at work and so what happens in the faith community is more than just religious theory or positive thoughts in someone's mind or a string of words that sound good. When God is active what's routine is transformed and the

power of the gospel becomes real. The poor receive good news. The wounded are healed. The broken are made well. Those in prison are set free. The lost are found and the blind will see. This is what Luke is telling us today. The reality of God is never routine. A life that open to and filled with God's spirit can not be lulled into a sleepy or mindless pattern. We see it in Jesus. We see it the day Jesus began his mission as the Christ. The words of scripture came alive. What was read was more than just a promise or a hope. The truth became real in Jesus and his mission as the Christ changed everything.

Luke's gospel wants us to know what the Spirit enables Jesus to do and he wants us to recognize how God is working in our lives. We share in Christ's mission. The Holy Spirit is looking for ways to shake us out of our routine so that new life flows into us and through us. This morning we've celebrated our partnership with the ministry of Watoto Read. It's been such a blessing to get to know Claudine and her passion for this ministry, and there's nothing routine about it. Some might say, "The church has simply done what they always does. We've raised some money, helped a good cause, and handed over a check." Well, yes, we've done things like this before. But God's Holy Spirit is at work here. God is active in Claudine's life and in the lives of those who are partnering with her. God has connected us to a mission that makes an impact on the lives of children on the other side of the world. These kids are the poorest of the poor. They are the lost and the forgotten,. These refugee children in Chad live lives where the routine is hardship and struggle and uncertainty. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) As we celebrate with Watoto Read that word has been fulfilled. It's not routine and it certainly isn't all because of us. It's the Holy Spirit has filled us up and is flowing through us and Claudine and the others so that poor and the broken and the least of these will have life.

Jesus did the work of Christ and because the Holy Spirit working in him is the same Spirit working in us, we share in that mission. Be inspired this week to give and to serve and to live as Spirit filled people.