

**Reflection on the Gospel-3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C
(Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21)**

-Veronica M. Lawson

The liturgy for today juxtaposes the introductory verses of Luke's gospel and a passage from the beginning of Jesus Galilean ministry that encapsulates and sets the tone for the whole gospel. If we had no other part of Luke's gospel than these twelve verses, we would know a great deal about the gospel and about its author's intentions.

From the first four verses, we know that Luke is not an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus but is endeavouring to provide an orderly account on the basis of reliable eyewitness accounts handed down to the community by "servants" or ministers of the word. We know that Luke's is one of many and not just four gospels. We also learn that the gospel is carefully researched and addressed to a person of influence called Theophilus, a name that means lover of God or beloved of God. We might guess that Theophilus is Luke's patron, someone who provides the necessary funds to produce this work, and possibly the early equivalent of an RCIA candidate. We know from the grammatical construction that the author is male. And most importantly, we know that Luke sets out to place on a firm foundation the teaching that Theophilus has received about Jesus. The word translated as "truth" (*asphaleia*) in our lectionary can also mean certainty or assurance. Luke wants the gospel message to be well grounded.

When we turn to Luke 4:14-21, we find a dramatic scene set in the Nazareth synagogue. This programmatic scene sets the tone for the whole gospel. Luke's gospel story is about the release that comes from the gracious and expansive love of God mediated through God's anointed and Spirit-filled prophet. Every significant event in Luke is powered by the Spirit of God. This event is no exception. The Spirit-filled Jesus searches out and proclaims a passage from the prophet Isaiah, a combination of Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:9. He then points to his own mission as a fulfilment of the Isaian prophecy. Jesus thus presents himself as the Spirit-filled anointed one of God who brings good news to the destitute or homeless poor, release to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed. The Greek word translated as "oppressed" literally means "shattered". It evokes images of asylum seekers in detention centres and of the hundreds of thousands displaced by war. It evokes the pain of the Earth itself and the other-than-human inhabitants of our planet suffering the effects of climate change and ecological destruction. If the gospel message is to be well-grounded in our times, the "destitute" and "shattered" of our Earth community must find the "release" of which the gospel speaks.