

“Good News?”

Sermon delivered 1/24/10
Immanuel Lutheran Church
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Luke 4:14–21

Then 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.”

If we begin with “the end in mind”, we would focus on the last sentence of the Gospel lesson being ~ “today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” When Jesus spoke these words, he was speaking in the present tense. When we hear these words of Jesus for our lives, they are spoken to us as new and fresh words. We don’t come here for information. We can get information from books, television, internet, CD’s, Podcasts, and DVD’s. We are here for *formation*...shaping or lives and being shaped by God TODAY.

Our Gospel opens with reports about Jesus spreading through Galilee. Following his baptism, being filled with the Spirit, He spoke in synagogues and was “praised by everyone”. Expectations were high, with Jesus returning home, “all eyes were upon him”, watching him, remembering, and then at service he was handed the scroll of the prophet

Isaiah. Some call this the fourth temptation. We all know the three temptations in the wilderness with the Evil One. It could be considered tempting to perform before the hometown crowd and tell them what they want to hear ~ give them what they want.

Jesus doesn’t give in to this temptation. He reads from the book of the prophet Isaiah where it is written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because God anointed me to bring good news to the poor.....proclaim release of the captive....recovery of sight to the blind....let the oppressed go....proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor...” Jesus resisted the temptation to play for the hometown crown. He read these words looking into the eyes of those he played with as a child, the woman who watched him while his mother went for water, the men who hung around his

father's shop as he was growing up. All the eyes were on him, and they got tighter and tighter. Next week, we will see how their pride turned to resentment, how they run him out of town.

"Today" these words are addressed to us. We are the hometown crowd who gather this morning for a Word from the Lord for our lives. We hear good news for the poor, release for the captives, sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed. Probably few of us related to blindness, oppression, poverty, and captivity. How many are the opening words of Jesus ministry, his mission statement, and his inaugural address? Nothing about being saved, born again, saved by grace, law and gospel....no, just some words about the poor, blind, captive, and oppressed.

Now if we see Jesus as God's incarnate. If Jesus is God and the heart of God is being made known, the invisible being made visible, then we must beg the question we don't want to beg....what does all this have to do with us? The hometown crowd didn't like what he had to say, and I suspect we wish Jesus would have a different agenda; perhaps be more theological, ethical, spiritual, and maybe even psychological, but he isn't. So, today we hear the heart and the core of God's love for those of us whom the rest of us may hardly think about. So, let us take these words Jesus spoke as begin fulfilled "Today", and see what is behind them for our lives.

Those life changing words of Jesus for our lives "today" are difficult words. They are difficult for those who first heard them, and they are difficult for us today. So, let us cross the first hurdle of taking them literally. No, Jesus doesn't mean to open the prison doors and let the murderers out. We want to look behind these words to see what he means for our lives.

We are tempted to define the poor simply in economic terms. But, for Luke, the term poor not only means the economically challenged, but also those who are placed outside of the parameters of being the people of God. Jesus refused to recognize the boundaries when it came to the love of God. The unclean, the sick, and those at the bottom of life would be included. The rejects of society were excluded from worship in the Temple and the Synagogues because they were unclean.

No one ever said, until the time of Jesus, "Blessed are the poor, the meek, those who mourn..." They, like us, would say, "Blessed are the wealthy, the strong, the good looking, the healthy, the young and the vital." This is because we consider these to be worthy qualities, the opposite of these are considered a curse. This is the difficulty we all have with addressing our poverty, suffering, and captivity. When asked how we are doing, regardless of the truth, we say "fine". How are you? Fine. We cannot see the poverty and suffering in others until we see it in our own lives. If we deny it in ourselves we have no compassion

for others. We are all held captive in one manner or another.

If you want to know your “captivity”, ask yourself this question, “What is going on in my mind at three in the morning when I suddenly wake up?” We may wake up to the question, “Why is all of this happening to me?” “What did I do to deserve this?” If this is your experience, consider the fact that you probably have an inflated view of yourself and your life. Jesus proclaims “good news” to you “today”.

The Good News is always specific to where we find ourselves today, and acknowledging that place. The good news Jesus was addressing in your life is this; if you are overwhelmed with guilt, hear the words of forgiveness, if you are suffering, know “God is your refuge and strength”, if you are dying, the good news is that death is not the last word, but instead, hope. The Gospel is always specific as we see it in ourselves; we see it in others because both contain the spark and the image of the divine. What is keeping you in prison, captive, and poor? What is blinding you to this same problem in the lives of others? You want the Good News in your life. You want the experience of the Divine in your life.

The Spirit of the Lord that was upon Jesus in the synagogue is the same Spirit that is upon you today. The power of God is moving in your life. Most of our lives we hear that we are not enough, so we do all kinds of crazy things. The faith journey is the experience of God moving in our life,

calling you, anointing you, and blessing you for a purpose. Most of us, if not all of us are very familiar with our pathology, and how messed up we think we are, but few of us are in touch with the spark of the divine in our lives, and seeing it in the lives of others.

Now, how do we move from what we *know* to what we *do*? It is more than what we do, it is how we live our lives. Jesus speaks of “today” this scripture is fulfilled. Today? Today invites you to act. How? What? The Spirit of the Lord is upon you TODAY. As the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jesus that day, it is upon you today. You can begin today....I did not say you had to finish today, just begin. We can become trapped between yesterday and tomorrow. Living in the good old days tempts us to escape today as well as tomorrow if possible. Today the Spirit of the Lord is upon your life. Today the Spirit is moving you in a compassionate way to _____? Today is a time to change by the power of the Spirit in your lives, you are here today because you want more than just hearing and talking about the power of God. May the Lord grant you the courage and compassion TODAY to begin.....