

“Jesus’s Mission”
A Sermon by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday November 13, 2022

Luke 4:15-21

If you could go forward in the future and went to a museum on American culture and you found a baseball cap that said MAGA on it, you might find a card beside it and guessed that MAGA was an expansion baseball team that was only in existence for a short time.

The people who found the cap and even the historians couldn’t find any reference to MAGA. The word was on a ball cap, so they figured this was some kind of baseball team.

It makes sense, but the historians would be totally wrong. And if you were to try to tell them that MAGA was a slogan “Make America Great Again” they wouldn’t really understand, unless they had a good grasp of American politics in and around the years 2020.

We have some of the same challenges as we try to understand the Bible. Today we are reading the rest of Luke 4 from verse 16 to the end of the chapter. There are things that we read sometimes, without really thinking about what this meant in Jesus’ time.

Jesus entered the synagogue in his hometown - as was his custom. Jesus was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and he started to read. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.”

Who are “the poor”?

The poor are the poor as we understand it, but they also include some of the rich - the tax collectors and any who were despised or looked down on by the culture. The poor, the sick, those who were blind or lame, or had leprosy were assumed to be under God’s curse.

Jesus was sent to bring good news to everyone who was thought to be excluded from the kingdom of God. The good news is that everyone is welcomed by Jesus.

Jesus was proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour – a year when debts were forgiven, and the land was restored to the people. This was indeed great news! Jesus was proclaiming himself as the long-awaited Messiah, who would lead the people to freedom from Rome, who would bring healing and new life to all of Israel. At least that's what the people heard.

In the pages that unfold in the gospel narrative, we see more clearly how Jesus understands himself as the Messiah. It is clear that the people are so thankful for Jesus' words. Vs 22 says "All the people spoke well of him."

I can imagine sitting in the synagogue, hearing the words of Isaiah being read, hearing that they would be fulfilled by our hometown boy. Think how good this will be for all of us, I would be thinking to myself that Jesus is going to bring healing to us - surely, we are going to be first in the kingdom. We will be first in God's plan; we will execute and overthrow our enemies.

But Jesus continues, that the kingdom may not look or be exactly as they expect. Jesus reminds them of two narratives from the scriptures, and in both God saved foreigners.

Can you imagine living in an occupied country, living under the oppression and brutality of Rome, then a local guy, a prophet, first says those words of comfort hope and longing from Isaiah, but then he dared to imply that somehow God cares for Rome too. Who did he think he was?

I don't know if I can fully understand the reaction - but they are suddenly angry and already we see that Jesus' message is opposed. In Vs 29 they drive Jesus out of town, trying to throw him off a cliff and he leaves them. Vs 31 shows Jesus began his work, fulfilling all that he said he would do from the scroll of Isaiah.

Demons seem to recognize Jesus clearly. And we see that Jesus has authority. The crowd all recognizes it when he taught, and the authority was manifested when Jesus cast out demons and healed people.

God spoke and it came to be – life out of chaos, light out of darkness. Jesus spoke that same word of power that accomplished life and healing. By Vs 40 we have Jesus in Galilee and all who were sick were brought to him and he healed them. And in Vs 42 Luke says that all the people in the area came to him and wanted him to stay with them.

So, what do we take from this passage? What are the implications for us, the “so what”?

First, as I see Jesus with his hometown crowd, I’m reminded that there is a wideness to God’s mercy. God’s rescue plan is big – big enough to include our enemies, those who have hurt us, those who we think are despised and beyond God’s reach.

The poor, the disqualified, those who think are excluded are actually invited and called by Jesus, which means that they should be invited and accepted by the church that bears Jesus’ name.

Second, I am reminded that Jesus has power and authority to speak and to bring life and healing. Some of you know the healing power of Jesus’ presence in your life. Share that good news with others who need to know that there is new life in Jesus’ name.

And finally, we do what we see Jesus’ doing. We are his disciples, apprentices, we do what our Lord did, as we are able. We care for people – bringing them healing, we pray for people that they would be set free from evil powers. And we pray.

Jesus was not governed by the voices of the crowd who loved him, nor the crowd who opposed him. Jesus went away to pray, and he kept his eyes fixed on the mission that he had been given by his Father. He was sent to preach the good news to other towns as well.

That needs to be the central part of the mission of the church – to preach the good news of the Kingdom- to share and proclaim and live the message entrusted to us, for there is no one else who will.

Let us pray:

God we are so grateful for the gospel writer who lays down a firm foundation for us to know Jesus, our Messiah and Lord. God we are so thankful that there a wideness to your mercy, that invites us, that saves us, but is also wide enough to include our friends, and our enemies, those who we think should be disqualified, those who seem beyond your grace.

Help us to be people of prayer, who are not swayed in our mission to proclaim the Kingdom in word and deed. We follow in the steps of Jesus as you help us. Amen.

Thanks be to God.

Luke 4:16-21

¹⁶ When 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, ¹⁷ and 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 set free those who are oppressed,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ And 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. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."