

“Jesus Tending Community and God’s Mission”

Luke 4:14-21

Sermon by Sherm Kauffman

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. 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, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “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, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” 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. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (NRSV)

Last week we considered the spiritual formation work that Jesus needed to engage...in order to prepare him for the mission he was sent on. Jesus submitted himself to be identified with the fresh spiritual awakening that was occurring. John the Baptist offered a baptism of repentance and Jesus chose to participate even though repentance didn’t seem necessary. We noted how the Spirit confirmed his son-ship with sight and sound.

Jesus, now FULL of the Holy Spirit and on a spiritual high, was brought face to face with 3 key vocational tests by the evil one in the wilderness. He navigated them by relying on the ancient words of the tradition given to the Jewish faith community. If we want to be followers of Jesus, it seems to me that we must answer these same three vocational tests as well...so that we can stay focused on the central mission of God in the world.

Luke reports that Jesus returned from the wilderness... now, filled with the POWER of the Holy Spirit. We have the option of exploring the difference in the word choices used to describe Jesus’s relationship with the Holy Spirit in this and last Sunday’s texts; being “Full of” or “filled with” the Spirit in 4:1 and ‘in the Power of’ in 4:14. That could be interesting but it’s not the point we’re exploring today. However, just to note that Luke

was thoughtful about those word choices. I wonder why they made a difference for him. Is there a dynamic difference for Jesus? Might there be a difference for us?

Please allow me to digress a bit here to reflect on the vision banner behind me?

We commissioned Gretchen Kingsley, then of Fellowship of Hope in Elkhart, to develop a banner with the vision statement on it and visually she captured the central idea of flow, of movement, of direction that comes from above and moves on through. So this banner belongs to the IN-MI Conference office and can be borrowed by congregations.

When a new vision statement was being developed in the early 90's, it was offered to the denominational bodies for reflection and comment. Persons from the charismatic renewal movement were concerned that there was no reference to the role of the Holy Spirit in the vision. There was a suggestion that the phrase, "and by the power of the Holy Spirit," be added and so it was.

On much reflection and use of the vision statement over the years...my personal bias would modify the inserted phrase to, "and by the empowering Holy Spirit." It is not forced on us. However, the Spirit does empower us beyond our own capacities. The Spirit of God has a central role in forming and maintaining the community of faith as they tend the mission of God in the world. So my edited version (of the edited version ☺) would read; "God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ, and by the empowering Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world."

Now, back to the point I want to make this morning. Jesus made it his practice, his custom, his habit, to gather with the community of faith as they gathered for worship and faith development. It seemed to be important for him to join with the community rather than to stand on the edge and proclaim, or preach his message as John the Baptist and other prophetic voices of the past.

A phrase that is so easy to overlook in the passage this morning is in verse 16, when he went to his home community "*he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, **as was his custom.***" He had been teaching elsewhere, according to Luke, so now it was his

opportunity to teach at home, where he grew up. Now, some of you may not understand this, but I can attest to the anxiety that goes with teaching in your home community. People know you too well. It's just different than teaching as part of the broader community.

So, Jesus, practicing regular worship attendance... is given opportunity to select a reading from the prophet Isaiah and chooses 61:1-2a to read. The tradition would have been to have a reading selected for a given Sabbath kind of like the lectionary guide. It is not clear whether Jesus ignored that tradition and selected his own text...or did the synagogue leaders anticipate messianic possibilities and they selected Isaiah for the reading that day...or was it by God's finger that this particular passage was, in fact, the preselected reading. We just don't know. Would it make a difference if we knew?

Now, Isaiah was regarded as a major voice in Israel's history foretelling the coming Messiah. Modern scholarship also regards him as the voice describing what we have come to know as the Peaceable Kingdom.

This text is an echo, a condensation of Isaiah 58 where the prophet contrasts the current practice of fasting and worship in verses 1-5 with "a day acceptable to the Lord," in verses 6-14. It is filled with core values and behavior expectations that honors the essence of who God is and what is expected of those tending God's mission in the world. It is much more detailed than 61:1-2 and seems repetitive in places. The portion that Jesus read in today's text summarizes and personalizes what appears in Isaiah 58. Jesus used less words to say more.

Now, it makes me curious as to why Jesus may have chosen to stop reading where he did, or at least where Luke reports that he stopped. Was that Jesus' choice or was that Luke using editorial privilege? We don't know. We can ask; why didn't he continue and at least finish the sentence, which goes through 3a? The very next phrase following the recorded reading is "*And the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn...*" and that was left off. The "day of vengeance of our God is about judgement for sin and Jesus leaves that off...?? Why would he do that? Isn't judgement an essential part of the message?

Judgement seemed to be the central part of the message I heard for much of my life and it's still very prevalent.

Does Jesus' choice here have any implication for us or no...??

Now, the synagogue practice was for the reader to stand to read the text and then sit down to expound or teach from it. So I invite you to stand and read with me the text that Jesus chose is read...

"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,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Did you notice the personal pronoun? Let's read it again...please...

So after the reading Jesus sits down and folk are dying to know what he was going to say about his choice of text because they had heard of his gifted teaching.

Jesus then publicly embraces this text as the mission of God in the world and claims it as his own...by saying;

"Today, that is TODAY... not sometime future...this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing..." This mission of God, this kingdom that Isaiah described centuries ago, begins now...!! This peaceable kingdom that supersedes all other expressions of God's kingdom is open for business today!

He doesn't exactly endear himself to the religious leaders though. By taking liberties with what was clearly written in the law he challenged the elite. He transformed the letter of the law by following the vision clearly articulated by Isaiah that he now claimed as his own. In doing so, Jesus raises the hackles of the religious aristocracy.

The placement of these two stories, the wilderness and the home town synagogue, back to back...and for Jesus to indicate that God's Spirit was anointing him to carry out this mission is a strategic placement by Luke. Jesus is portrayed as one who carefully pays attention to tending community in the context of where he is with a clear and unmistakable purpose of tending the mission of God in the world by implementing the peaceable Kingdom as described by Isaiah.

Luke follows with stories of Jesus staying away from Jerusalem for a time. He names and calls the 12... does many healings... gives a prominent role to women and in other ways, meets the needs of the people... then in the early verses of chp 9, Jesus sends the 12 on a mission to carry out work similar to what he had been doing. The disciples are overwhelmed by the demonstration of the Holy Spirit's work through them. It was soon after that event that Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem...his final movement toward the center of religious power and authority.

Jesus says, NO, 3 times before saying YES to the voice that set the course for his life.

If Jesus found it important to pay attention to God's activity in the world, moving from the center to the periphery, and submitted himself to participating in that activity, would we do well to follow suit...especially if we want to claim to be followers of Jesus Christ?

I wonder... would our community, our world, be better served if we would embrace the same text that Jesus used, as the central focus for our living. Is it time to retire Vision Healing and Hope? Might we simply use this ancient text as the central guiding beacon as we tend our souls and community in tending the mission of God in the world? Just wondering...

Next Sunday, Lord willing, we'll look at the story of Jesus sending out the 70/72 no-name missionaries. This is the story that snagged my attention so many years ago and has shaped my understanding of HOW we are to go about tending God's mission. It is really quite different than the traditional view.

As I have tugged on the snag in the fabric of Luke's tapestry over the years, these two stories from the 3rd and 4th chapters exposed the thread pull as foundational and

formational for Jesus as he tended his soul and participated in God's activity, God's mission. Later, in October we'll see where the thread pull shows itself in the other direction...with the story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10.