

## Luke 4:14-21

14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup>He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

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, <sup>17</sup>and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup> ‘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,

<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’

<sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’

### **To Act Enthusiastic...**

*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, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor!*

What impact do those words have upon you? Do you feel that they apply to you or to someone else? Do you say to yourself, “Well I’m not poor or imprisoned or blind or oppressed, so he must be speaking to someone else.” Maybe you’re a little skeptical about “releasing captives;” most people in prison are there for a reason. I’m all in favor of restoring sight to the blind and freeing those who are oppressed by no fault of their own, but again, those are people who I’m not directly involved with. I feel pretty good about life as it has been going. I feel pretty secure.

But just how secure are you really? We are still reeling from the tragedy that occurred in Parkland, Florida on Valentine’s Day – or Ash Wednesday. Any parent with children in school must be feeling some anxiety about the level of violence that our nation seems to tolerate. Teachers, I know you feel it, too. And you may not feel poor, but how many of you have mortgages, car payments, student loan debt, or medical bills that have you living hand to mouth? This is Black History Month; how many of you feel slightly less privileged than others because your skin is a darker hue or your ancestors came from the wrong country? And how many of you feel, in spite of all the good that America has brought to you, all the prosperity and the standard of living that ranks you among the wealthiest 2% of people in world, that something is missing, that this paradise is not everything that you had hoped it would be? Despite our wealth and prosperity and security over 100 people each day die from an opioid overdose. Despite our vast resources and high standard of living nearly 100 people die each day from gun violence in this

country. Over 40 million Americans suffer from anxiety disorder, and over 16 million have major depressive disorder. Maybe you tell yourself that you're immune from all this, safe and secure in your home somewhere on the south shore of Staten Island, but you know otherwise. Wealth and prosperity and home security systems do not shield you from these illnesses and addictions or random acts of violence.

All that being said, listen to Jesus' words again see how you feel:

*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, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor!*

As individuals, as families, and as a nation we commit a lot of resources to physical security; we have perhaps the strongest military and the best police force in the world. Parents spend so much of their income on homes in "safe" neighborhoods, on good schools where their children will thrive, on sports and dance and music and other skills so that they will grow up to have great career choices, so that they too can live in safety and security and have all the recreational options that they could ever desire. But as hard as we work to get that satisfaction, that security, it is always elusive for so many reasons. You cannot obtain enough wealth or power to ensure your security let alone your happiness. We need only look at a few of history's most powerful people and see how their paranoia led them to acts of violence against those they perceived were a threat to their power. Listen one more time to Jesus' words:

*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, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor!*

In a very real sense, all people are oppressed by the fear of losing something. All people are enslaved by their drive for security. All people are blind, stumbling around trying to find something that this world just cannot offer them. All people are poor because they will never have enough money or power or guns or walls or fences to bring them the level of satisfaction that they crave.

Which is why it's important to notice how Jesus begins his speech: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me*. It is such a deep tragedy that in our obsession with physical security and safety and satisfaction that we so neglect the Spirit. Some even deny that there is a Spirit. But the Spirit is the only route to true joy in life. The Spirit is the only source of security and of peace in our lives. Taking up the story where we left off last week, Jesus has just returned from the wilderness, a place where he had no safety or security in a physical sense – the scripture makes a point of saying he was out there with wild beasts; he probably had to sleep with one eye open. But he went to the wilderness, a place of physical danger, a place that most people would avoid, led by the Spirit, and it was in the wilderness where he was fortified by the Spirit, which empowered him to come out of the wilderness and proclaim this great news. We need not live in fear and doubt! The kingdom of God is upon us!

Hear Jesus' words, and trust Jesus is not the only person who has been anointed by the Spirit; the words that he spoke in today's scripture lesson were written by the prophet Isaiah 500 years before Jesus. The Bible is full of accounts of people who the Spirit fell upon, so you shouldn't feel that somehow you are not a candidate for the Spirit's anointing. The Spirit can anoint you and lead you. Our worship series is about being born anew – which we can also translate to be born of the Spirit. It can happen to you. It can happen to any one of us.

Here we are nearly 2000 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, and we're still amazed by him – and it's not just about the Resurrection. It's not just about the miracles. Neither the resurrection or any miracles are mentioned in today's text; just Jesus coming out of the wilderness, coming into a synagogue and declaring his mission. That is the meat of the matter; that is why hundreds of people started following him throughout Galilee and why millions of people follow him today. *JESUS PROCLAIMED GOD'S KINGDOM TO BE RIGHT HERE IN THE MIDST OF THIS WORLD*, this world of competition and violence and warfare and crime and hatred and insecurity. Jesus tells us that the kingdom is here. There is certainly sin and death in the world, but if the Resurrection proves anything it's that sin and death do not have a permanent grip on Jesus nor on those who follow him. Jesus understood this before he was ever arrested and crucified; he told his disciples that he *would* be arrested and crucified, but he also told them that on the third day he would rise. He was the first fruit of the kingdom, and he assures us that we will follow him. He invites us to join him.

And to invite others to join him. This is where the mainline church has lost so much of its impact – mainline Christians have lost the motivation to PROCLAIM the kingdom of God as Jesus proclaimed it and as the disciples proclaimed it. And my message is not so much about you going out and proclaiming the kingdom as it is about you being *motivated* to proclaim the kingdom. To *act* enthusiastic you need to *be* enthusiastic; there's no faking it. And to be enthusiastic to you have to be saturated with the Holy Spirit, as Jesus must have been having spent 40 days in the wilderness.

The life of the average mainline American Christian is spent doing the same things as the non-Christian the entire week except the hour two on a Sunday morning in a worship service, and even *that* fails to be a priority to a lot of Christians. I understand why it's not a priority; because God is not a priority. Because prayer is not a priority. Many people are just going through the motions until the day they wake up and ask themselves, "Why am I going to church?" And many of them fail to find a reason and stop going to church.

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom with enthusiasm because he believed in it with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. Do we believe in Jesus? Do we believe his message? Or are we just hedging our bets that he was right so that when we die we have a better chance of spending eternity with him than we do with anyone else?

What will revitalize our church? Believers who proclaim what they truly believe. We can have the best music, the most comfortable seats, the nicest stained-glass windows... we can change social hour to happy hour, classic movie night to adult movie night, we can have caviar and espresso and all those wonderful things, but none of that will save the church. Only true belief which comes from true devotion and leads to proclamation. That's what will save the church.

My prayer for you is that this season of Lent drives you into a wilderness of sorts, where you can spend time with the Holy Spirit deepening your relationship with Christ. Hear Jesus' proclamation with new ears, with excitement and enthusiasm, that you, like Jesus, will be driven to proclaim that same message that's been drawing people to Christ for nearly 2000 years. May God bless you and give you that time to enter into his presence as you may never have done before. Amen.