

Today

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Luke 4: 14-21

FPC Uvalde
Jan. 24, 2010

Two weeks ago, we read about the baptism of Jesus, and chronologically speaking, the next event to happen in the Gospel of Luke would be Jesus in the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan. We are going to wait till Lent to talk about that. Today, our Gospel lesson moves us to the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry; his very first words to the public.

Hear now these words according to Luke from Chapter 4: 14-21.

Read Scripture
SIT

That felt pretty weird, didn't it, that I just read the Scripture and sat down. You expected to hear some explanation of what I just read—some interpretation and application of how we are supposed to apply these words to our life, right?

I'm wondering if that is how those folks in Nazareth felt when they heard these words from Jesus. The text says, "All eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him." Yours' surely were on me as I was sitting there. I'm sure those folks were astounded at Jesus' words. I wonder just how astounded we are.

"Today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." That is the sermon. That was Jesus' sermon. Today with YOUR hearing, the Scripture has been fulfilled. That's it—a one-line sermon that says it all. What you just heard Jesus read from the scroll—a quote from the book of Isaiah told the people what his ministry and work on earth would be all about. It was his mission statement, if you will.

Jesus was setting forth his agenda. The Spirit had anointed him from the very beginning for this mission, even as the Spirit descended upon him at his baptism and led him into the wilderness. But what has Jesus been anointed to do in our passage today? Isaiah's words make it very clear: Bring good news to the poor. Proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind. Let the oppressed go free and proclaim God's jubilee year—when debts are cancelled and land is returned.

These are earth-shaking words. No wonder the people in the back of the temple were murmuring about his words when he just rolled up the scroll and sat down. How could their teacher say such words to them with no explanation?!

I'll bet they had to reframe Jesus' words into something they could understand a little better; into something a little more personal and a little less literal—not unlike what most of us do when we read this passage.

Surely he could not have meant captives like actual people in prison. Surely he must have meant our captivity to spiritual temptations like too much TV and not enough Bible reading.

You know it's strange what we modern day folks do with words in the Bible. We insist on literal meaning of things we agree with but when we come to something that's too hard or too threatening, we look for a meaning behind the words or above the words or beyond the words. What if Jesus did literally mean what he said? That really is earth shaking!

I am going to cut you some slack today—First, because I am FAR from being Jesus, and second, I want to explore together what this scripture might mean for us today.

Part of what I believe Jesus was doing was drawing a new set of boundaries for these folks—and I should say, for us as well. Most of you know that Bob and I own a home in Driftwood, up near Austin. We have a very large backyard, and also own a very small, little dog—Hampton. The view out the backyard is great and we didn't want to put up a fence that would block the view. We decided upon an invisible fence for Hampton.

How these fences work is like this: The perimeter is laid out where you want your dog's boundaries to be, a wire is buried, you put a special collar on the dog that will give them a "correction" if they cross over the boundary, and you set out to train the dog. Flags are put up along the boundary lines and the dog owner spends time training the dog every day until you are able to take the flags down and the dog knows where his boundaries are. Hampton now lives happily within his boundaries—most of the time until a deer or squirrel comes along that he simply cannot resist.

I think Jesus was doing for the folks he was preaching to that day in the synagogue what I did for Hampton. It was like he was walking his listeners around showing them their new boundaries, pointing out where the flags were. In this case, though, he was expanding their boundaries instead of restricting them like we needed to do for Hampton.

It was if Jesus was telling them their new street address, or showing them where the flags were placed—and saying, in effect, "This is your place—it is within these parameters that God intends you to live—THIS is the Kingdom of God."

You see, the people hearing Jesus that day were not experiencing God's kingdom. They were living in the Roman Empire and they hated it. They irritable and angry and were wondering why God had not kept his promises. Jesus knew, though, that it was not a problem with God—God was keeping God's promises, they were just living in the wrong neighborhood, within a set of boundaries that didn't really include the boundaries of God's kingdom. Live in this neighborhood, the neighborhood that has the boundaries of

Good news to the poor

Release to the captive

Recovery of sight to the blind
 Freedom for the oppressed
 The year of the Lord's favor

Live in this neighborhood and the fulfillment of all God's promises are available to you—you may just have to pack up and move.

"You know its one thing to talk about sharing good news with the poor at some time in the future—after the economy has settled down and the stock market has rebounded. It's another thing to say, "Let's move into this new place *now--Today*." Do we really want all the accumulated inequities wiped out? Do we want our wealth redistributed, for everyone to have equal opportunities when we have more than our share of the money? Do we want that done *Today*?

There are a few Christian magazines that list prison inmates who have asked to receive mail from Christians. Would you set the captive free through your words? Would you write a letter to a prisoner and give him your address? Would you let your daughter?¹

It is almost impossible for us to hear these hard words of Jesus today, as I'm sure it was for those folks in the synagogue thousands of years ago—Impossible to hear if it were not for one thing. When Luke tells this story he begins by saying "Jesus was filled with the Spirit." The first words Jesus reads are the "Spirit of God is upon me." The key to understanding the compassion of Christ is recognizing that Jesus lived in the Spirit of God.

The Spirit led Jesus to see that every life is sacred. The poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed matter to God, because beaten, bruised, broken lives are no less holy than any other lives. Jesus recognized that the presence of God is here for all of us. The Spirit is all around us.²

"TODAY, the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," Jesus told his listeners. Does Jesus also mean *today*? **Yes.**

Today the scripture has been fulfilled in *your* hearing . . . in each of you hearing and knowing the voice and, hopefully, feeling the powerful presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I suspect this sermon may leave a few of you wondering what in the world I just said; what is the real message here today I that I want you to take home with you. I think there might be a different message for different people in this sermon. Try to remember this sermon this week—think about my words and Jesus' words this week as you discover where the flags are that mark your boundaries.

Jesus told the people in Nazareth the reason he was there—the core of his ministry. I pray that we, too, may follow in his footsteps as we explore our new neighborhood and the boundaries of God's Kingdom together. Amen.

¹ "The Spirit of Jesus." Brett Younger, McAfee School of Theology, Atlanta, Georgia.

² Bid.