

Luke 4:16-30

¹⁶He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As was his custom, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. ¹⁷The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed,
¹⁹and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

²⁰He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹He began to tell them, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

²²They all spoke well of him and were impressed by the words of grace that came from his mouth. And they kept saying, "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

²³He told them, "Certainly you will quote this proverb to me, 'Physician, heal yourself!' Do here in your hometown everything we heard you did in Capernaum." ²⁴And he said, "Amen I tell you: No prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵But truly I tell you: There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut for three years and six months, while a great famine came over all the land. ²⁶Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow of Zarephath, in Sidon. ²⁷And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was healed except Naaman the Syrian."

²⁸All those who were in the synagogue were filled with rage when they heard these things. ²⁹They got up and drove him out of the town. They led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰But he passed through the middle of them and went on his way.

Good News

I.

It's different, isn't it? There he is, in the front of the congregation. He's reading Scripture to you. Sometimes students read at Christian Education Sunday, or for the Children's Christmas Service. That's not so unusual. This was something completely different.

You have known him a long time—maybe even his whole life. You even *taught* him a thing or two, maybe in a classroom, maybe just showing him how to tie his shoelaces, or play a sport, or build something. Now he's standing up there reading the Word of God and preparing to tell *you* something.

It's happened before, right here at this very pulpit. One of the more recent Seminary students to preach here is a son-*in-law* of the congregation, but many still knew him a few years before he got to the Seminary. The other is a son of the congregation. Many have known him since he was just a boy. What did you think when these two young men stood here to present the Word of God to you?

You probably saw it as good news. It's good news to know that young men have gone through the intense studies needed to enter the preaching ministry. It's good news to see them and hear what they have learned in the years since you saw them last.

In fact, the reason you gather at church is to hear good news. Even when the news is filled with bad news of crime and hatred and discontent, you know that when you come to church you will hear good news. Even when you have to look at your own life and all the bad news of ruined relationships—or just your own sin—you know that you will hear good news at church; specifically the Good News about Jesus.

Jesus was like the returning Seminarian. He joined the other worshipers in going to the

synagogue that week. It was his custom, Luke tells us, to go on a regular basis. His custom was more than a habit, more than something he did just because it was the thing to do on that particular day. He didn't find it beneath him to go and listen to the same words of Scripture over and over again.

Even though it was something he did every week, going to the synagogue was a little different this time around. Just before our text Luke reports: "News about [Jesus] spread through all the surrounding area. ¹⁵He was teaching in their synagogues and being honored by everyone" (Luke 4:14-15, EHV). He had become a bit of a celebrity. With his growing reputation, it seemed like the thing to do to invite him to speak at the synagogue.

Their worship followed a pattern, just as ours does. In fact, the patterns of a liturgical worship service find their roots in Old Testament worship. There was a Psalm. There was a reading of a portion of the Law—the Torah—the books of Moses, and a reading from the prophets. After the reading there was usually an explanation of one of the readings—a sermon.

II.

"The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written..." (Luke 4:17, EHV). Luke doesn't make it clear whether the words Jesus read were the designated reading for that Sabbath or whether the lector was allowed to pick the spot from the scroll handed to him.

Whichever it was, Jesus read: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, ¹⁹and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19, EHV). You recognize what Jesus read as coming from *our* First Reading today from the Isaiah 61. The synagogue goers had heard the reading before, too. They recognized that Isaiah was referring to the Messiah, but they understood it in a civil and political sense.

The year of the Lord's favor meant the year of Jubilee. From the time Moses had given information about the Year of Jubilee, it had never taken place. Jubilee was a pie-in-the-sky ideal that was *supposed* to happen every 50 years. Debts were to be cancelled—all of them. Land—every acre—was to be returned to the original family that had owned it. If anyone had been sold into indentured servitude to pay off debt, he was to be set free that year.

Those who had taken a Sharpie to cardboard to let everyone know about the circumstances of their lives that had left them destitute and standing on a street corner to beg passers by for spare change would get a reprieve, too. It seemed to them that Messiah's "good news" would be that the pie-in-the-sky Year of Jubilee was finally going to be fulfilled.

III.

Jesus handed the scroll back to the attendant, signaling to the crowd that teaching time was about to begin. Perhaps the typical sermon had been one that indicated when Messiah came he would make everything easy and wonderful. Maybe they would be encouraged to play their part in civic righteousness. They could help Messiah by doing good to others.

What would the hometown boy say? They listened intently. "He began to tell them, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"" (Luke 4:21, EHV). What a shock! He didn't even have to point to himself to make them realize that Jesus was saying *he* was the long-promised Messiah.

Luke doesn't tell us the rest of the sermon, but the people seemed to realize Jesus wasn't saying he would solve all their social problems. He wasn't going to completely eliminate their debts to fellow citizens, or wipe out poverty. He wasn't going to grant pardons to the wrongly accused or outright criminals. Landowners couldn't count on him to return every acre they could rightfully lay claim to.

He had read that he was anointed to "preach good news." The good news they were looking for was good news about life.

All the sacrifices the people made to God taught them that sin is serious—sin demands a life as payment to God. The repetitious sacrifices taught them that no sacrifice is ever enough. They

couldn't hope to stay on the right side of God's anger over sin.

Jesus brought *better* news than what they expected. He brought the Good News from God for every sinner. Jesus *is* the Good News.

IV.

"They all spoke well of him and were impressed by the words of grace that came from his mouth" (Luke 4:22, EHV). The people reacted the way we might when a son of the congregation preaches at Holy Trinity. They were impressed. Jesus sounded very wise.

You would think they would take his message in and sing their Hallelujahs that God had, at long last, fulfilled his promises. They should have rejoiced in the Jubilee and said: "Hurray, we're free!"

But they thought more about what he said. "They kept saying, 'Isn't this Joseph's son?'" (Luke 4:22, EHV). They knew Jesus' humble roots. He had grown up in a carpenter's home. Some of them had taught him. How dare he claim he was in the same category as the prophet Elijah? How *dare* he claim that he is the very Messiah God promised?

Jesus said: "Certainly you will quote this proverb to me, 'Physician, heal yourself!' Do here in your hometown everything we heard you did in Capernaum" (Luke 4:23, EHV). If he were going to claim to be the Messiah, they wanted proof.

Jesus pointed out that Elijah wasn't accepted in Israel, either. Elijah took his signs and wonders to a widow from a foreign land, who *could* believe in what the true God was doing for her. The story of Elijah was to warn the people that the great Good News he brought them might be taken away from them and given to others.

V.

"All those who were in the synagogue were filled with rage when they heard these things. ²⁹They got up and drove him out of the town. They led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰But he passed through the middle of them and went on his way" (Luke 4:28-30, EHV).

Some still react the way the people of Nazareth did. They still look for God to give them a sign outside God's Word for proof that there is a heaven, or that Jesus is who he says he is. Some still want Jesus to make their earthly lives easier—to take away their financial problems or their health problems or their relationship problems.

How do *you* respond to the Good News Jesus brings?

The "poor" are poor in spirit. They realize there is no hope of approaching God on one's own—they cannot stand in his presence because of their own sin. The Good News from Jesus means sight for those who are blind. Without God sending his Holy Spirit to us, we who are poor in spirit could not hope to see the truth of what Jesus has done.

What Jesus brings is Good News of freedom from debt—debt to God—the debt of sin. Jesus came to bring you the good news of Jubilee.

By faith you see what those sitting in the synagogue could not—*would* not. You see Jesus' mission completed. You see God's love poured out for you in Jesus' birth, his earthly ministry, his death on the cross, and his ascension into heaven. You trust Jesus as your personal Savior.

Every pastor, every guest pastor, every seminary student who stands in this pulpit and preaches a sermon to you, is duty-bound to bring you that same Good News. It's the same message the prophets brought to Old Testament believers. It's the same message Jesus taught in his hometown synagogue.

From cover to cover the Bible is Good News. Sin came into the world and caused all kinds of problems, but the Good News is that God never stopped loving people. From the very beginning he promised to bring salvation and forgiveness to us.

The Good News is that it is finished. Jesus is the Messiah who was long promised. He died and rose again for you and for me. That is shockingly good news. Amen.