**TO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS**

September 26, 2021

Luke 4:14-30

Key Verse 4:18 – *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.”*

In today’s passage we witness Jesus Christ’s first recorded sermon. In it, he shares His purpose for coming into this world and into our lives; to liberate us from sin and experience true freedom in Him. Let us seriously consider what His proclamation means to us and what He ultimately has to say about us.

Look at verses 14 and 15: “**Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.”** Between Jesus’ victory over the Devil in the wilderness and the events of this passage, about a year has passed by. We are unsure why the author Luke skips over such a lengthy period of time that included Jesus’ first miracle (turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana in John 2:1-12) as well as teaching in various synagogues of that region. However, Luke bridges this gap in time by focusing on the role the Holy Spirit plays in all this. The same Spirit that descended on Jesus as proof that He is God’s beloved Son (Luke 3:21-22) would soon after lead Jesus out into the desert to confront the Devil (Luke 4:1-2a). Jesus was full of the Spirit and was led by the Spirit in preparation for His earthly ministry. Now, He was fully empowered by the Spirit to finally begin His messianic mission in earnest.

Let us read verse 16a, **“He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.”** Jesus had two activities He routinely did. The first was spending time alone with God in prayer (Luke 5:16, 6:12, Mark 1:35). The second? Going to the synagogue. Yes, even Jesus Christ regularly attended what we would now refer to as church. But why? Didn’t He know everything already? It is because of His love for God, for hearing God’s Word and for being among God’s people. Even from a young age, Jesus loved hearing about God. Famously, He even got separated from His parents Joseph and Mary, only to be found in the temple courts sitting among the teachers of the law, listening to them, asking questions of them and amazing them with His own answers to their questions (Luke 2:41-52). When asked by Mary why He had gone off on His own, what was Jesus’ reply? Luke 2:49 reads, **“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”** *“I had to be!”* Words not of obligation but of passion and desire. The church is not simply a building that we go to on Sundays. It is where we come into the very presence of Christ Himself. It is where we give Him our thanks, praise, and joys but also our pains, our tears, our sorrows and our fears. It is where we grapple with His word as it shapes our minds and changes our hearts to become more and more like Him. And the best part is that we get to share this amazing gift with our brothers and sisters in Christ. In short, the church is Our Father’s house; our family and home through Jesus Christ.

Speaking of home, one can only imagine what the scene was like in the synagogue that day. Jesus, the hometown hero was finally going to be the one preaching to them. What was He going to say for His first ever sermon to them? Let us read verses 16b-19, **“He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”** These verses are famously part of the Isaiah’s prophecy about the Messiah in Isaiah Chapter 61. This prophecy was given in the middle of the lowest point in Israel’s history as the entire nation was held captive in Babylon. Yet this prophecy spoke of a new hope; a saviour who would crush their enemies, liberate them from their captivity and restore the nation to how it used to be. Fast-forward about 600 years later, Israel was now under even greater oppression due to the Roman occupation. It’s easy to see how such a passage meant so much for the people at that time. And with what Jesus does next, it would mean a whole lot more.

Look at verses 20-21, **“Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** Notice how Luke creates such dramatic tension by breaking down Jesus’ every motion, describing the eyes of everyone in attendance squarely focused on Jesus… and then, Jesus hitting them with the mic drop to end all mic drops; **“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** Jesus is the very fulfilment of this glorious messianic prophecy. Later on, when asked by the disciples of John the Baptist if He was the Messiah, Jesus replied, **“Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor”** (Matthew 11:3-5). Just as Isaiah prophesied, Jesus did all the things promised of the Messiah. But the best was yet to come.

Let’s go back to verses 18 and 19 and break them down further. First, **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.”** Jesus is the Anointed (i.e. Chosen) One sent by God to bring the “good news” to the poor. The best way to think about “the poor” is how Jesus starts the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3, **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** Those who are poor in spirit are those who humbly recognize their spiritual emptiness and acknowledge their need for Jesus. As we learned through our summer Bible Study on Romans, no matter how good or moral a life we live, we will never be able to live up to God’s perfect standard. No matter how successful a life we live on the outside, it ultimately can’t cover up all the sins we hide on the inside. But to those who turn to Jesus, He proclaims the good news; that He has come to free us and save us.

Next line, **“He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners.”** The key to understanding why this passage is so important lies in knowing what we have been freed from and what we are being freed to. The Greek word used for here for freedom or liberation is “*aphesis*.” But what is Jesus giving us *aphesis* from? It is from the most enslaving, tyrannical and oppressive force known to mankind; sin. As mentioned before in last week’s wonderful message by Msn David, Jesus was tested in the wilderness, having to overcome the power of sin in the form of three temptations; the temptation of seeking earthly security (turning stones into bread), the temptation of taking a shortcut to avoid suffering (bowing down to the Devil) and the temptation of seeking the approval of others rather than approval from God (jumping from the temple). These temptations, like so many others, are ones that we all face every day. Everybody has sins that they struggle with and many times it feels there is no escape from them, like a ball and chain permanently shackled around your ankles while becoming heavier with each every failure to overcome them. We become prisoners to our sins with no power to free ourselves. I have a very close friend who has been suffering with ADHD for more than half his life. It took twice as long to get through university and made it impossible for him to hold down a job for more than a year, let alone try to get married and start a family. Now, he’s about to go on a treatment program that will cost him tens of thousands of dollars because of just how terribly it has affected his life. He shared with me that the hardest parts about this isn’t about the money or the years he’s lost. It’s the hopelessness, despair and the total exhaustion he feels within him even though he strongly believes in Jesus (he’s a devout Catholic). This is why Jesus evoking the imagery of a prison cell is so powerful and fitting. Sin robs us of our God-given free will, making us its eternal prisoner. Sin leaves us in spiritual darkness, making us blind to our real state before God. Sin oppresses us from all sides, leaving no possible way out.

Yet thanks be to God that we have Jesus who has the power to free us from these prisons of our own making. If there are any doubts, then consider verses such as Romans 8:2, **“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”** Or Hebrews 2:14-15, **“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”** And lastly, John 8:36, **“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”** Christ experienced every hardship known to man. Poverty, hunger, homelessness, loneliness, misunderstanding, trauma, betrayal, injustice, death. You name it, He lived it! And He’s not removed from or ambivalent to your struggles because He wants to be right there in the middle of them with you.

Furthermore, Jesus Christ has come to bring the year of the Lord’s favour. In Israel’s history, this was also known as “the year of Jubilee” (Leviticus 25:8-55). Every 50th year, all debts were cancelled, all slaves set free and all land returned to their original owners. No matter how badly someone screwed up in life to get into such a desperate situation, the year of Jubilee was the opportunity for a fresh start on life. Everyone fears making a mistake in life so terrible there can be no turning back. But in Jesus Christ, there is no such thing for He already paid the penalty for all our failures on the cross. No matter how badly we screw up, Jesus offers His forgiveness and an opportunity to start anew. And do you know what the Greek word used in the Bible for forgiveness is? *Aphesis*! If sin is what we have been freed from, then true life in Him is what we are freed to. Christ has declared a Jubilee that goes on into eternity for us all by setting us free, cancelling all our debts and bringing us into His heavenly household forever. Christ desires to dwell in us and transform us in His likeness so we too can bear the fruit of His Spirit, blessing the lives of all those around us (Galatians 5:22-23). We’re called to go into the world sharing this good news (i.e. the Gospel) with all who are still under the power of sin. Praise the Lord!

Verse 22 describes the amazement that hit everyone at the exact same moment. Every Jew understood that anyone who uttered that specific line was claiming to be the Messiah. Never before had anyone spoken so graciously, preached so authoritatively… and of all people, it was one of their own! Joseph’s son! The carpenter! Finally, something good was coming out of Nazareth (John 1:46). However Jesus had the one thing that every preacher wishes they could have; the ability to see exactly what was in their hearts. They spoke so well of Him but if they really believed He was the Messiah, they would have asked for Jesus to save them right there and then. Instead their stubborn hearts could not get past the fact that this was Joseph’s son and so they desired something else instead. Look at verse 23, **“Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”** Jesus knew that they weren’t interested in Him being their Saviour. All they wanted were the miracles. So Jesus turned the tables on them.

Look at verses 24-27, **““Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.””** To the horror of His hometown, Jesus picked these two prominent examples from Israel’s history when God’s blessing did not go to Israel but to the Gentiles. (1 Kings 17:7-16, 2 Kings 5:1-27). The synagogue was so irate that Jesus would dare suggest that God could ever love the Gentiles like He loved Israel. They were God’s chosen people. The good guys. The insiders. Yet their pride blinded them to the truth of Jesus’ words and the gracious offer He held out to them all. In their eyes, this was blasphemous and an offence worthy of death. It is reminiscent of the warning given to the church in Laodicea; **“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked”** (Revelation 3:17). The meeting soon turned into a mob as they even tried to throw Him over the nearby cliff but Jesus walked right through them for His time had not yet come (28-30). Tragically, this confirmed they were still under the power of sin as shown by their self-righteousness, ethnocentrism and willingness to even kill Jesus.

This should serve as a reminder to us all that God’s blessing will always go out to those who see their absolute need for Him. Remember what Jesus told the chief priests and all the “good” religious people of His day, **“Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him”** (Matthew 21:31b-32). Those who believe they have their life in order and that they are “fine” see no need for Christ and will therefore react to Him in ways ranging for total indifference to outright hostility. But God is always reaching out to the outsiders, the ones that the rest of the world views as the least worthy for they are the ones who most readily accept Him and His gracious offer of freedom.

At the core of every human heart is the desire for real freedom. People are willing to fight and sometimes even die for it for one cannot live without it. Through His death on the cross, Christ gives us ultimate freedom from sin. We neither had the power nor the desire to go to Him but He lovingly came down to us to save us from the dominion of death. He has smashed open the prison of our sins and calls us to experience real freedom and joyous life in abundance in Him. He proclaims us free! However, Christ has also given us the freedom to choose. Will you accept Him with humility or reject Him with hostility? Will you trust in what Jesus has already done for you or will you keep trying to save yourself? The choice is yours. Choose wisely.

**BIG IDEA**: Jesus freed us so we can be free to follow Him