

## Called to Proclaim

### Luke 4:14-22

<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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.” <sup>22</sup> All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

## Theme Statement

As we comprehend the meaning and significance of Jesus' inaugural sermon in Nazareth and sense the impact of his pronouncement there, we align our faith response with Jesus' call and mission.

## Exploring the Word

*Up to this point in the Jesus narrative, Luke has spent considerable time setting the stage. Two angelic encounters prepared those directly involved for the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. John's ministry has been detailed, and Jesus' baptism articulated a divine call to a unique and specific relationship with God. Luke 3:23-38 traces Jesus' genealogy and is followed by his encounter with temptation in the wilderness.*

### Luke 4:14-16 The start

Luke tells us that Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit and began teaching. The news about him was known all through the countryside.

Note the continuing thread of the Spirit's presence in Jesus' life. It starts with the angel's announcement to Mary (Luke 1:35), Elizabeth's exclamation (Luke 1:41-42), Simeon's presence in the temple (Luke 2:27), Jesus' baptism (3:22), and Jesus' wilderness temptation (Luke 4:1).

### Luke 4:16-17 At home

We finally hear Jesus' verbal response to God's call and his clarification of what it involves when he returns home and goes to his familiar synagogue. Luke reminds us that Jesus was an observant Jew and regularly attended worship at the synagogue.

Synagogues probably came into existence when the nation was in exile in Babylon. As the Jews had no central worship site, they met together where they could. These

gatherings evolved into a place for prayer, reading of the Torah, teaching, and meetings of the faith community. By the time of Jesus, many village synagogues had developed to the point that they had *mikvehs*, places for ritual baths outside the entrance. To have an official prayer service, ten people needed to come together. In this period of time, they could be either men or women or both.

Jesus was invited to read. The synagogue service was not conducted by leaders but by members of the congregation selected by the Rosh-ha-Keneseth, or chief ruler (Luke 13:14). The service started with lay-led prayers, then a reading from the Torah. A reading from the Prophets followed, and if the language of the scriptures was not understood, a *methurgeman*, or interpreter, was to interpret them in language the congregation understood. Jesus read and interpreted the words from the scroll of Isaiah.

### Luke 4:18-19 Back to the future

The passage Jesus read from Isaiah (61:1-2a) features a speaker whose identity was interpreted as the writer Isaiah. The language of this passage parallels verses in Leviticus 25 that describe the year of Jubilee.

Jubilee was to be a celebration, every fifty years, during which society was "reset." Debts were to be forgiven, land returned to the original families, and everyone returned to a level playing field. This proposed practice reinforced the concept taught in Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it."

Isaiah spoke to a people in exile who longed for a return not only to their land but also to a social system where all were equal. Before exile, however, they had not practiced what they now wanted.

The people in the synagogue were not in exile, but the land was occupied and under the control of Rome. They longed for a different social system as well.

#### **Luke 4:20-22 A glimmer of hope**

The words of Isaiah speak of hope in a situation of despondency. Jubilee was intended to return people to a place of interdependence, not submission. As you read Luke, you can imagine Jesus rolling up the scroll, returning it to the attendant, and sitting down. Luke says everyone was looking to see what he would do next. Would he offer an interpretation? The anticipation must have been palpable. Then he said something momentarily satisfying: “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Jesus essentially said, “This scripture is about me.” And the people spoke well of him. They liked what they heard.

## The Word Today

At the time I am writing this, the people of this planet are in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. A frightful number of people have contracted the disease and a tragic number have succumbed to it. People in the United States are under state requirements to practice social distancing and self-quarantine. As the weather in the north is warming, people are feeling isolated and uncertain. A word of hope is needed.

In many ways we are like the people of Nazareth in Jesus’ time. While we are in our own towns and cities—places that are familiar—we are also restricted by forces beyond our control. Our movement is limited, our resources strained, our future not as clear as it was earlier. Our interaction with each other is restricted. We wonder if life will ever be the same.

As you read this in January 2021, you can assess the words of those who spoke of hope last spring. Were those words merely idealistic or did they include a realistic view of what “normal life” might be, going forward?

This writer does not know what life will be like at the start of 2021. The response of the people around the world may have made a positive difference. Hopefully, a focus on “us” more than “me” will have moved us in a healthier direction. That distinction is simultaneously critical and difficult.

Similarly, the study of this passage in Luke is further informed by what follows it. The people’s initial reaction to Jesus was one of acceptance and maybe pride in the “hometown boy.” But it didn’t take long for the self-focus of doubt to creep in. The people started questioning Jesus’ pedigree, which led to questioning his ability. The words of hope they longed to hear became a call to changes they needed to make. Realizing that Jesus was talking about the reset of Jubilee, they saw a change coming to their own lives.

Perhaps you have been able to sort through many of the changes that have happened since the spring of 2020 and, even more important, to consider the road ahead empowered by the Holy Spirit. The reset of our relationship with God accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus continues to unfold in the midst of life today.

## Questions for Discussion

### **Beginnings**

1. What worship song or hymn has lifted your spirit the most in the past few weeks?

2. When do you feel compelled to share encouragement with others?

### Exploring the Word

1. Why do you think Luke says Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit?
2. The weekly readings in the synagogue probably followed a predictable order similar to Christian lectionaries today. Do you think Jesus planned when he was going to be there based on the readings? Why or why not?
3. Take turns explaining how Jesus accomplished the tasks described in Luke 4:18-19:

Proclaim good news to the poor

Proclaim freedom to the prisoners

Proclaim recovery of sight for the blind

Set the oppressed free

Proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

4. Write a short synopsis of how people responded to Jesus' public announcement of his call to ministry in this session's scripture passage. If possible, use fifty words or fewer.

### The Word Today

1. Who have you seen embrace a call to care for others during the COVID-19 pandemic? How did others respond to them?
2. Which of the following statements make sense to you at this time in your life?

— Each person is called to do something in God's kingdom.

— Ordinary care for others is not a call but a responsibility.

— Those who are called to ordained ministry are best able to tell others about Jesus.

— "At all times preach the gospel. When necessary use words." (attributed to Francis of Assisi)

### Closing Prayer

*Almighty and most merciful God, we call to mind before you all whom it is easy to forget: those who are homeless, destitute, sick, isolated, and all who have no one to care for them. May we bring help and healing to those who are broken in body or spirit, that they may have comfort in sorrow, company in loneliness, and a place of safety and warmth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (ELW, p. 79)*

### Further Study

Matthew 4:12-17; the beginning of Jesus' ministry

### Daily Reading

M. Deuteronomy 8:1-11

F. Luke 4:1-13

T. Leviticus 25:8-17

S. Luke 4:23-30

W. 1 Kings 17:8-16

S. Luke 4:14-22

T. 2 Kings 5:1-14

### Memorization

**Luke 4:18-19**

[Jesus said,] "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."