



# Jesus the One and Only – Mission

Luke 4:14-21

TRINITY PULPIT

**I**t was poet Maya Angelou who said, “When a person shows you who they are believe them the first time.” Jesus has come from the wilderness where he had been tempted. There in the desert the Devil had tempted him in three ways. Jesus had been tempted to make his ministry about material provision but Jesus had rejected this temptation. Jesus’ ministry would be about provision but it must be something more. Jesus had been tempted to make his ministry about power and might. Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, rejects power and might as the basis for the Kingdom of God. Jesus knows that what we call power and might is not eternal. Jesus is tempted to make his ministry about entertainment. He is tempted to constantly wow the people and impress them. However, Jesus knows that we are fickle people and what wowed us yesterday will not wow us tomorrow. There is never enough if all that is offered is the fleeting feeling of the moment. Jesus’ ministry must be deeper and more meaningful than how we feel in any given moment.

Rejecting these temptations Jesus is now ready to begin his ministry. Jesus, we are told, returns to Galilee and begins to preach in the synagogues, and the news is spreading across the countryside. In fact, Luke comments, everyone praised him. Everywhere Jesus went in his own region people were accepting him, listening to his message, and praising him for his ability to preach and teach. He was popular and this popularity was growing.

Then the homecoming occurs. Finally, after preaching in various places in Galilee he returns to his own home town of Nazareth. Luke says, “[I]t is where he was brought up.” In the words of Kenny Chesney, “[I]t is back where I come from.” There is something special about coming home. There is something special about being with those who brought you up. There is something special about seeing familiar faces. Can you imagine the excitement? Jesus’ popularity has been growing in the region, and I am sure word had reached Galilee about the one who was the son of the carpenter Joseph. Did not Mary and his siblings still live with them?

He was one of their own and now he was growing in popularity as he came home to his own synagogue. No doubt as the people prepared to hear from Jesus there was rumbling and whispers. Do you remember when he used to play with our children? I remember teaching him here in the synagogue. Some of them probably took great pride that they had been part of Jesus’ upbringing. I remember him as a kid, or a young man. I remember him being here among us in worship. Now look at him. They must have been so proud.

They have gathered for worship and instruction on the Sabbath day. Jesus, we are told, was accustomed to going to the synagogue on the Sabbath. How important for us to notice that Jesus the Son of God found worship with God’s people on a weekly basis essential. It was his custom. It was what he did. All those who think Jesus came to undo Judaism are mistaken. Jesus had not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. He had come to embody what it meant to be in relationship with God.

Luke says that Jesus took the scroll of Isaiah and found a particular place in the scroll. In other words, this was not a random reading. It was not even the reading of the lectionary for the day. Jesus was getting ready to make a proclamation. Jesus was getting ready to announce his mission statement. Jesus was preparing to let us know what is important to him.

Jesus chooses to read from Isaiah 61. He reads:

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.”

“When someone shows you who they are believe them the first time.”

It is a familiar passage. It is a passage about a promise that has been made by God. God has promised a messiah will come and when this messiah comes he will usher in the year of the

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Lord's favor. They knew it well. It was the kind of passage and promise that made you look at each other and say "oh yes...someday." Today it might not be favorable for us but some day. It is the kind of feeling we get when we sing songs of heaven. When we sing *When We All Get to Heaven* or *I Can Only Imagine*. Those songs of promise make us think of a time that is to come that it will surely be a time of the Lord's favor.

Jesus' reading these words must have caused those in the crowd to smile and even to find a moment of comfort knowing that God had promised to them a day when all would be set in the proper order and someday—yes, someday—God's kingdom would come. How proud they must have been that Jesus chose that text.

Then Jesus begins to preach to them. He begins by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." We don't know the rest of the sermon but we do know that they were impressed with the way he spoke. In fact they were amazed that Joseph's son had the ability to preach as he did. All seemed to be going well but things turned difficult quickly.

In fact, by the end of this sermon and time of worship, those who were Jesus' own church community were so furious with him they took him out to the edge of town, and to the brow of the hill, to throw him off the cliff. The people turn from a proud community to an angry mob in just a few moments. What was it that Jesus said that caused them to change their attitude so quickly toward Jesus?

It could have been the words of Isaiah. Jesus said I have come to speak good news to the poor, freedom to the prisoner, recovery to the blind, and release to the oppressed. I have come to tell them that God's favor is upon them. The debate has been if Luke was speaking literally here or figuratively. Was Jesus saying that he had come to give good news to the poor or the poor in Spirit? Was Jesus saying he had come to free the prisoner or the one who is a prisoner to sin? Did Jesus mean that he had come so the blind could see or that the spiritually blind could see? Did Jesus mean that he had come to release those oppressed in society or those who are oppressed spiritually? YES...The answer is yes. Jesus had come to preach good news, heal, set people free — physically and spiritually. Jesus had come to proclaim the favor of God that is for the whole person, and even more than the person, for the whole people of God.

So what was so abrasive about Jesus' message that day? Let me offer three thoughts. First, Jesus is telling us that his mission was to tell those who did not think they deserved it that they had been included in God's plan and love. When we look at the list of people mentioned

by Isaiah in the passage Jesus includes, we discover that all of these people were part of what would be generally referred to as "sinners". The blind, the prisoner, the poor, and the oppressed were those who did not believe they had God's favor nor deserved God's favor. Yet, Jesus says I have come for them. I have come for those who do not think they deserve it.

There is something about entitlement that seems to shut down the work of the Spirit in our lives. In fact, Jesus alludes to this in his remarks. He says surely you will quote this proverb, *Physician heal yourself*. Do here in your

hometown what we have heard you did in Capernaum. If Jesus was healing and doing miracles in a place like Capernaum that was full of "those people", you know, not "God's people." Then surely in this place, in Nazareth, in his own hometown, in his own home synagogue, Jesus would do mighty things. In fact, maybe they thought they were entitled over others to receive Jesus' healing power. They had been Jesus' religious community. They were his family and friends. They must have taken some sense of responsibility for his success. They were entitled. Yet, Jesus said no prophet is accepted in his own hometown.

It is hard for God to work in our lives when we feel we deserve it. It is hard for God to set us free, for us to receive good news, for us to have a sense of release when we think we are entitled to it. A spirit of entitlement can cause us just like those in Nazareth to miss what God can do. Instead it is those who are poor, oppressed, blind and the prisoner that are going to be able to receive the favor of the Lord.

Jesus tells so many stories of those who thought they were entitled but were missing the Kingdom of God. There is the rich young ruler. There are the 9 of the 10 lepers who are healed. There is the constant reminder to the Pharisees that they need a new perspective on righteousness. There is the Centurion who tells Jesus that all Jesus needs to do is speak and his child will be healed. Jesus says of the Roman Centurion, I have not found such faith in all of Israel. In other words, how is it that this Gentile has the kind of faith that I desire from God's people?

Those who were sure they deserved the good news never seemed to be able to receive the good news. Yet, those who discover they have been included in God's favor when they never have been in anyone's favor, are the one's who receive this good news. God's favor had come for those who had never known favor. Those who thought they were entitled were in danger of missing the message of good news.

Jesus proclaims his mission is for those who were

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*"When a person shows you who they are believe them the first time."*

*—Maya Angelou*

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outsiders; in fact, Jesus included those whom others include as enemies. This promise from Isaiah had been for God's people. This was a passage that reminded them that they might be persecuted, but the day was coming when God would bring favor upon his people, and their enemies would receive what they deserved. In fact, in Isaiah 61 the last part of verse 2 says, "[A]nd the day of the vengeance of our God." In messianic hope, God's people not only relished the thought of God's favor on them, but, once and for all, God's judgement on others.

Yet, when Jesus read this passage he stopped short. He left the part about God's vengeance out. He had come to proclaim God's favor, but he left out God's vengeance. In fact, he not only did not read the part about vengeance, but he then went on to give two illustrations in this first sermon about how God had chosen, through his prophets, to bring healing and provision, not to God's people but to a Gentile. Jesus says that during the famine there were many widows in Israel, that Elijah could have been sent to, but instead God sent Elijah to the widow of Zarephath in Sidon — someone who was an outsider. There were many lepers in Israel in Elisha's day but not one of them was cleansed — only Naaman of Syria. He was another outsider.

Jesus said God has included those that you even consider an enemy in God's favor. In the Kingdom of God that Jesus is ushering in, we have to think differently about our "enemies." Jesus would say we should love our enemies and pray for them. Jesus would say don't seek revenge but let God deal with vengeance. When Jesus was asked, what are the greatest commandments, he said, Love the Lord God and love your neighbor as yourself. When they asked, who is my neighbor, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan. In that story the hero is none other than the outsider — the one who was thought of as an enemy.

In a recent article, a Canadian Pastor tells about learning how to love one's neighbor. She admits that she really does not have an enemy. Oh, those we disagree with on Facebook or those who oppose our theology, etc., they might be annoying but are they an enemy. In Lebanon the church has seen the enemy and embraced them. For many, the enemy in Lebanon has been Syria. The Lebanese have known years of pain from Syria. Many can tell a story about losing a loved one at the hands of the Syrians. She tells how she has heard story after story after story.

- A pastor in a sermon told this story: "My father was killed by Syrians."
- A woman told us this: "I stood at gunpoint before Syrian soldiers as I held my baby and prayed for

God to take me first."

- A church leader recalled this: "This entire town was under siege by Syrians for 100 days, with no food or medical supplies allowed past."

Story after story of pain, loss, and grief.

Christians from Lebanon have had to do this. For the last five years, their enemy has come to live in their backyard. I can't even fathom how difficult this must be! It sounds like it should be a nightmare, and for many, it is.

But that is not the story I heard in Lebanon. The story I heard was the story of Jesus-following, heart-changing, life-altering, love.

Jesus' followers in Lebanon had to make a very real choice in the last five years — the choice between loving or hating their enemies. They had to face a tough reality. Their enemies were now all around them and these enemies were hungry, lonely, and homeless.

As much as they might have wished Jesus had given them an out, he had not. He didn't say, "You don't have to care because they're your enemy." He said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" — so they did and do.

What enemy-love really looks like:

That pastor, whose father was killed, has a church that reaches out to thousands of Syrian families. A few weeks ago he invited a Syrian refugee to the front so he could wash his feet in front of the whole congregation, to remind them what it means to love and forgive. His church has grown from 60 to 900 people and two thirds of them are refugees.

The woman who prayed at gunpoint is part of a church that cares for 500 displaced Syrian families. She has her "own" families that she visits. Every week, she has tea with her enemies — except now, of course, they are friends. She told me recently that learning to love her enemy was one of the greatest challenges she ever faced, but it has brought her

great blessing.

In that town that was under siege there is a church working tirelessly to care for 2000 Syrian families. The church started by hoping to help 100 families, but the need grew and grew, so they kept giving. Now, they give out 1400 food hampers every month. They provide diapers, job training, social support.

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When they asked families what their greatest needs were, the answer for many was education for their children. In response, the church started a school in their basement, and when they ran out of room they set up a tent to help more children. The people doing this are the same people who sat under siege a mere generation ago, and now they're loving their enemies one food hamper at a time.

This same church also runs day camps every week. Yes, every week. They have a bus and bring children in for a morning shift, and then do a second shift in the afternoon. We got to see one of these day camps in action, and meet one of the men who works non-stop to help make them happen.

I was already near the brink of my emotional cup after watching these beautiful children get to experience such joy at these camps, when I met another leader who told me: "You know that man you met? His brother was killed by Syrians. And now he loves these children with all his heart."

Loving like Jesus taught us changes things. It is changing Lebanon!

For every story of someone who has known hate, there is another story of someone who has now experienced love and said: "Tell me about this Jesus."

What also could have infuriated the crowd in the synagogue that day were the simple words today. Those words are an indictment. It is one thing to talk about how things used to be. It is another to talk about how things might be someday in the sweet by and by. But Jesus says of the Kingdom's coming it is happening today. Today. Jesus, don't you know how things used to be? I can see how the Kingdom was present in days gone by. But today? Jesus, I know that someday things will be better. I believe that one day the Kingdom will come but how can you say today?

When Jesus says today this has been fulfilled in your hearing, he is not only announcing that he is the messiah and he has come, but he is also calling them to a realization of the Kingdom of God in their midst today. Today calls us to action. Today causes us to face the truth that we are not who we need to be, and that if we are going to join Jesus in the Kingdom's mission, then we have to change.

Maybe that is why they became so angry. Sometimes anger is the last response of those who do not want to

change and don't want to face the change of heart that must come. Those in the synagogue decide instead of joining Jesus today they would rather end Jesus' life today. They don't want to hear it. But there it is. Today.

Today calls us to account. The Kingdom is not something out there but it is right here and now. The good news is not a future proclamation, it is right now. That word "today" demands of us a decision. Are we going to join Jesus today or ignore him, or at worst, dismiss him? Either way the Kingdom has come. We can join it or miss it.

How do we join the mission of Jesus today? We do it one day at a time and one person at a time. I love the story Bob Goff tells in his book, *Everybody Always*, about a TSA agent at the airport where he would frequently fly. He watched this man treat people with respect and kindness day after day. Finally, Bob said, "I just want you to know that I have watched you and want to thank you for how you respect and show kindness." Bob said, "It is the kind of love Jesus shows." With that, the man came out from behind his counter and hugged Bob. From that point on Bob and his new friend would build a relationship, as Bob describes it, 3 minutes at a time. The time it took for him to stand in line and have conversation and not hold up everyone else. Over the years they became good friends. They even spent some holidays together. Over the years they built a relationship three minutes at a time. Goff writes, "I used to think making friends took a lifetime, but now I think it takes meeting people where they are, as they are, with the time you have. That is how Jesus met most of the people he encountered. The ones that he would call "friend" and the ones who would tell stories of how Jesus changed their lives. It happened three minutes at a time.

Joining Jesus today means to live life aware of those Jesus said he came to include and to proclaim what Jesus came to proclaim. Jesus said I have come to proclaim good news to those who don't think they deserve it. I have come to include everyone – even the enemy – and I have come to do it today.

That is the mission of Jesus.

When someone shows you who they are believe them the first time. ▲

