

Sermon – January 23, 2022  
“He has sent us!”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Luke 4:14-21

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen*

Good morning! It is great to see that everyone has survived the latest snow storm and cold. We are in the season of Epiphany, a time when we rapidly move from the arrival of light into the world's darkness with Jesus' birth and now follow his ministry and mission to all people.

I would like to start this morning by reading the vision statement of the Church. This is from Revelation 21:1-5: *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”* My hope is that we remember this passage from the book of Revelation, that we are beginning to grasp the vision of the Church, and we are starting to

understand where we as a local church fit into our mission to bring about this vision. The vision is the endpoint we are headed to as we journey with Jesus in mission. With the vision in mind, we now can move to getting a better grasp of God's plan to bring forth the vision. Let's join with Jesus on a Sabbath day in a little synagogue in Nazareth, the place where Jesus was raised, and see what we can learn about Jesus' role in God's plan. Luke introduces Jesus as one filled with the power of the Spirit. This introduction reminds us of Jesus' baptism where he received anointing with the Holy Spirit seen in the form of a dove. On this Sabbath, in Luke's Gospel, we are given a glimpse into a day in the life of Jesus as he taught in the towns and villages of Galilee. For Jesus, teaching is a key part of his ministry as he needed to teach the ideas, concepts, and actions that constituted his mission to bring about God's vision. For us today, teaching is still an important part of ministry. We are to set aside time for learning by hearing sermons, being part of Bible studies, participating in Sunday school classes, taking classes, reading texts, praying, and being part of mission projects and other activities that allow us to learn about Jesus so that we may be transformed through the renewing of our minds. On this Sabbath, Jesus is in Nazareth to teach. We should note Jesus' ministry is not done from one place with the expectation that people will come to him, but that he is itinerant, moving from town to town, going to people so that all people may hear his teaching. We also are to be prepared to go to people to share the Good News.

Let me give a little background on a Jewish synagogue service of the first century, as that will help us to understand what is occurring on this Sabbath day in Nazareth. To hold a service in a synagogue, there must be ten Jewish men present. The service begins with the congregation reciting the Shema. This is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. It is their call to worship. Let me read it from the NIV, "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*" Next, those present share in a time of prayer, some written and others, prayers for people. Then an attendant brings out one of the scrolls containing the Law and one of the men stands up and to read from God's Law, the Torah. The reader translates the words into Aramaic so all present can understand, and then returns the scroll

to the attendant and returns to his seat. That scroll is put away and one of the scrolls of the prophets is brought out. Another man stands up to read, again translating into Aramaic so that all present are able to understand. Following these readings is an exposition, a sermon, tying the two readings together and then the service is closed with a benediction. We might notice many similarities with our service today.

During the service, most likely when the time came for the reading from prophets, Jesus stands up, signifying his willingness to read, and the attendant hands him the scroll of Isaiah, a very large scroll. Jesus opens the scroll almost to the end and then reads some text from Isaiah 61:1-2 and some text from Isaiah 58:6. Luke shares Jesus' reading as "*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.*" Jesus then rolls up the scroll, hands it back to the attendant and sits down. And "the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Jesus." You see, Jesus is now supposed to give a sermon, to explain to those present what he has just read, and they are all anxious to hear what their home town boy has to say, to hear what others in Galilee have heard, and to also learn the source of the good reports they have heard about Jesus. Jesus begins his sermon by telling all of these who are focused on him, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Now in our culture, those words would be a drop the mic moment. Jesus has just made the claim that he is the fulfillment of the text he read from Isaiah. Jesus does not speak to some future time when he will accomplish fulfillment, but instead speaks to his ministry as fulfillment of those words. Let's look quickly at what Jesus is claiming.

When we translate the Hebrew Jesus read into English, we smooth out the word order to fit them into familiar English grammar structures. In Hebrew the word sequence is closer to "*Spirit of the Lord is upon me, For he has anointed me; To preach good news to the poor he has sent me: To proclaim for the captives release, and to the blind sight; To send forth the oppressed in release; To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" While that reading is a little rough to our ears, it lets the emphasis of the words shine. We can hear the repetition of the word "me" occurring three times at the end of the first three phrases. Jesus is claiming the Spirit of God is on him, anointing him as the one who will fulfill this mission of being sent to bring good news to the poor. This is the primary claim that Jesus is making, bringing good news to the poor. Next, we should have heard the word "release" repeated twice in the text Jesus reads. In the Old

Testament context, “release” should remind us of the Year of Jubilee, the time when all debts were nullified and the land returned to those to whom it was originally given. It was to be a time of restart; all things were to be made new again. Those who had sold or lost their land, the poor, would have the land restored and they would be given a new chance to live. When Jesus reads from Isaiah and speaks of release, he not only is speaking of making all things new, but assuring those who hear his words that he will accomplish release. The final idea we find is that Jesus will set free the blind. In this statement, Jesus is speaking to two aspects of setting free the blind. The first would be freedom through physical healing or restoration of sight, something we will witness Jesus do. The second aspect is spiritual. This restoration is salvation, the bringing of light to those who sit in darkness.

Much of Jesus’ mission is focused on the poor, but for Luke, the poor are not just those who are experiencing economic need. Luke’s idea of poor is more inclusive, including those for whom, due to their life circumstances, honor is diminished. The poor are not only those with spiritual, economic, or personal needs, but all who, for whatever reason, are outside of the boundaries of God’s people, those who are not considered worthy of being a part of the kingdom of God. One of the very early writers in the church, Origen, held that the poor were the Gentiles because they did not have the Law, prophets, and other sacred words that allowed them to know God. Jesus’ concept of poor clearly includes those experiencing economic need, and the church today is to still engage in ministry to those with such needs. Whether they are the homeless, those struggling to provide for themselves, or those marginalized by society for any reason, the Church, the body of Christ is to be engaging them. But Jesus will also make clear that the poor are also those outside the boundaries of the kingdom as society defines that boundary. Jesus will make this clear through his actions as he engages with people throughout his ministry, and we will need to note the breadth and depth of those whom Jesus considers to be the poor, those in need of good news, release, and restored sight. When Jesus reads this text and makes the claim of fulfillment, he is outlining his mission to bring about God’s plan to bring forth the vision. Now over the coming weeks, we will see various parts of this mission through Jesus’ actions in ministry. As we witness Jesus work, we will also witness Jesus fulfilling this mission. Jesus fulfills the scripture and is now seated at God’s right hand. The vision is not yet reality. There is more to be done in Jesus’ mission before the vision is complete and God wipes away every tear. Jesus left behind disciples who establish the Church, the body of Christ, whose mission is to

complete Jesus' mission and bring about the mission. I read the vision of the Church and Jesus has read the mission of the Church. We, the Church, are now those who are to be working to fulfill this mission statement and bring about the vision. As long as we are alive, we are in the game of mission work and are to be at work with Jesus in his mission. Our goal is to engage fully in Jesus' mission, leaving nothing on the playing field. We are to be those who hold nothing back, surrendering all to Jesus, striving with all we have. As long as we have breath in our lungs and the Holy Spirit filling us, we are to strive to be fully engaged in the fulfillment of Jesus' mission.

Remember, we have been baptized into the Church and when we were baptized, we also received the Holy Spirit and a spiritual gift. As Luke describes Jesus on that Sabbath morning, he also describes each of us. Jesus' mission continues through us as we use the gifts we have been given in the power of the Holy Spirit to join Jesus in his mission to all people. Jesus' mission statement is the mission statement of the body of Christ, the Church; it is what we are to be doing. We are the leaven that is to be placed in the bread that leavens the whole measure of flour. We are those who are spreading the kingdom of God one person, one transformed life, at a time. Each of us has a part in this mission. Each of us as a believer in Jesus has been gifted and empowered to work in Jesus' mission. We are not to take our gift and head out into the world on our own, in our strength, but we are to seek to join Jesus where he is already at work. As we seek to go to Jesus and work with him, we need to remember that Jesus is the vine and we are to abide in him that we might bear much fruit. As we abide in Jesus, we are able to be the hands and feet he is working through to bring about much fruit for the kingdom of God.

On Sunday morning when we come together to worship, we come as those who have been at work with Jesus in his mission. We come as those who are tired, our strength expended, often beat up, in need of renewal and release that we might again leave this place and go and join with Jesus in his mission. When we come to worship, we encounter Jesus through the Holy Spirit, filling us, letting us breathe, rest, and recover so that we can again go out into his mission, not alone, but filled with the Holy Spirit as Jesus was as he began his mission. So, come into the presence of our risen Lord this morning and rest, pray, worship, praise, and let Jesus heal us, revive us again and then send us back out with Jesus to continue his mission so that the full number may come into the kingdom of God. For some time now, we have ended our service with these words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because Jesus has anointed us to bring good

news to the poor. Jesus has sent us 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." We should say those words with our name, because we are sent by Jesus out to join him in his mission to all people. We, like Jesus, are those through whom this scripture is being fulfilled right here, right now. This is our moment, this is when we are alive, this is the day when we have a choice to make: "Will we leave this place to go about our own mission, or will we leave here, filled with the Holy Spirit, armed with our spiritual gift and with our eyes on Jesus that we might enter into his mission?" Will we receive our gifts, take them up, focus on what Jesus is doing, go where he is at work and join him wherever that may be to joyfully work in his mission to all people? We have been anointed with the Holy Spirit at our baptism. We have been gifted with the tool or tools we need, and the poor, economic and spiritual await release from their bondage, the blind are searching for light, captives to sin cry out for freedom, the oppressed groan under their unbearable burdens. They all await someone to come and bring them good news, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and to release them from captivity. The Good News we bring may be a cup of cool water, living water, a word of truth lovingly given, and the Good News shared in extravagant love. Jesus is at work in the world outside these walls. engaged with the poor in this place. Will we go and join him in his mission to all people?

*Pray with me: Come, Holy Spirit. Lord Jesus, open our eyes to see you at work in this place. Let us see those who are blind, poor, or captive and take our gift and go and proclaim the Good News to them as we seek to lift them up and be your eyes, feet, and hands, right here, right now. Jesus, send us out to join you in your mission to all people, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen*