

SERMON: January 27, 2019 What is the Good News?
TEXT: Luke 4:14-30
SUBJECT: Being faithful to God's intention
THEME: Living out the Good News is a challenge, God's ways are different from our ways.
PURPOSE: To promote the freedom that comes from trusting God.
PIC: "Good News!"

So - what is the "Good News"?

I'm interested, because whatever Jesus interpreted it as and what the people thought it was seemed to be widely divergent! Look at how they reacted to Him – at first, they were all pleasant and nice and saying how wonderful He was, and then He says something to them – and they get all upset and angry and try to kill Him!

Let's look at this passage a little closer to see what is happening -

Our scripture begins with Jesus coming into town, and being asked to read the scriptures in the synagogue. Maybe He had read this same scripture in this exact synagogue 15 years previous, in His first time reading the scriptures as a young man. The people could have even remembered Him, small, skinny kid, voice cracking, a whisp of a moustache first appearing on His upper lip. Not even tall enough to see over the lectern without standing on a stool!

Maybe this time, as Jesus reads, they were remembering a time not long ago in their minds when He had done this exact same thing.

This whole scripture today has a very familiar feel to it. If you've ever gone back to your hometown, where they knew you as a kid, how does it feel? Seeing old Sunday School teachers, ancient buildings, remembering how as a kid you used to go and hide behind that fence.

When I was at my high school reunion I was amazed to see how old everyone else had gotten! I still looked the same, but man – they were old!

And we seemed to fall into the old routines again – popular, unpopular, jock, cheerleader, nerd – those who had worked hard and had made something of themselves still somehow were remembered from who they were back in school.

Jesus goes back to his hometown. Local boy makes good. Fanfare and parade for the whole family! A big event – their little Jesus has become a rabbi!

But behind the public accolades I'm sure were still the thoughts – “He played with my kids – He was the know-it-all in school – I changed His diapers!”

Jesus reads the scripture, and sits down. What that meant was that He was going to teach. Rabbis would stand to read the scripture, then sit down to teach.

So “the eyes of all of the people were fixed upon Him.” And Jesus says, “**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**”

Pretty nice words. They weren't quite sure what He meant, but He was a local boy. They'd be polite to Him.

22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn't this Joseph's son?” they asked.

But here's the problem – they didn't get what He was saying! They had become so accustomed to the words that they didn't catch the significance of the meaning!

Let's look at this in today's terms – how would we feel if, because of the government shutdown, all of the prisons had to be closed and every single prisoner in our system was let out on the streets? From murderers to rapists to embezzlers and drug lords – every last prisoner was set free -

Would that be “good news”?

What about the “oppressed”? This has become such a buzzword today that everyone claims to be oppressed! One of the tactics of the powerful is to point out where they feel that they have been slighted, in order to take the focus off of what they are really doing and to minimize attention on they are actually doing.

So what is “Good News to the poor”?

This is the part that I want to focus on today, because I believe this is what really set the people of Jesus' hometown off.

To start with, ***What do you think “Good News to the poor” means? (Hint - it has nothing to do with money!)***

(TAKE ANSWERS)

I believe that something that God has put into every one of us is the desire to be like Him. God is creative. God doesn't just sit around. He rested on the Sabbath, but that wasn't because He was tired. (That's a different sermon – we'll get to that when we go over the Ten Commandments!)

God creates, and produces, and shares willingly with others. If we are truly made in God's image, then we have that same desire in us. It's the "Imagio Dei"- the image of God within us that drives us to make our lives mean something.

The "Good News" to the poor is not about money – it's about giving people hope. It's about providing opportunities for people to rebuild their lives and to make something of themselves.



<https://stmatthewshouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Shelter.jpg>

I am excited about working more with St. Matthew's House, where people recently released from prison get a chance to get back on their feet and to start over. Ex-convicts don't want to go back to jail. We are designed by God to make a difference, so helping someone to discover who God has truly made them to be is a great ministry!

I believe "Good news for the poor" might mean giving people hope and a chance - that we with the power give them an opportunity for jobs, training, a level playing field; that they get a chance to earn a living for their families and have the same opportunities as everybody else.

When you give somebody a hand up, you are honoring God. It means you truly believe that God has created this person, and that He wants for them to thrive. I do not believe that people are poor because they are lazy. I believe that God has put the same fire in every one of us, and that sometimes it just needs to be awakened.



<https://www.hospitalitynet.org/picture/153026238.jpg?v=1236332191>

That's one of the reasons that I support Habitat for Humanity – it's not a handout; it's a hand-up. There are millions of people who didn't get the breaks that I did, and God has created this world with plenty for all.

This all sounds well and good, so why did they people get upset with Jesus? Who could disagree with giving people hope and inspiration?

It has to do with what Jesus said next.

²⁴ "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷ 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."

²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

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The people were very happy to think that God was going to release the captives and give sight to the blind and set the oppressed free – as long as it was THEM that were on the receiving end of this! As long as it was themselves or their fellow Jews that God was going to make things right for, that was fine.

But then Jesus goes on and really upsets them by saying GOD DOESN'T JUST LOVE THE JEWS. GOD LOVES EVERYBODY EQUALLY.

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Now Jesus, wait a minute. We are God's people, and we have suffered much, and it is only fair that God should watch over us and restore us and help us. But are you saying that God loves the ROMANS?!?

And the Syrians? And the lawyers?



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/14/Raiders_fan_3_at_Falcons_at_Raiders_11-2-08.JPG

Jesus, are you saying that God loves Oakland Raiders fans?

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Jesus really ticks them off! “There were MANY widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, but Elijah was sent a widow in Zarephath in Sidon.” God didn’t save the Jewish widows who were in the same amount of need – He went to a foreigner!

And then Jesus angers them even more – “And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha, but none of them were healed. Only Naaman the Syrian.”

This incensed the people, so much that they were going to murder him right then and there! Not figuratively, but literally! They went to throw Him off the cliff!

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What angered them so much? The idea that ***Where we are born plays absolutely no role in God’s acceptance of us. Nationalism has no place in the Kingdom of God.***

Wow – isn’t THAT relevant! We are seeing throughout our world increased division based upon nationalism and tribalism. In France, in Germany, in Great Britain, in Africa, in the United States, in China, in Korea – a sense that “my country is better than anyone else, and I will do whatever I can to make us first.”

This was the attitude of Israel at that time – that they were God’s chosen people, and therefore were better than any other country.

But I believe that they misunderstood the word “Chosen”.

Being “chosen” does not mean that you are better or more loved than anybody else. Being “chosen” means that you have been given more responsibility than anybody else!

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None of us have earned God’s love. We are all broken, fault-filled, sinners. Not a single one of us here can go to the gates of heaven and demand to be let in, because we have been so good.



<https://vignette.wikia.nocookie.net/disney/images/8/86/Yensid.jpg/revision/latest?cb=20120107201955>

When I was child I used to think of God like the Sorcerer in the Mickey Mouse classic, “Fantasia”.

(This was when I was very young, so don’t think that I still believe that God is like this!)

My image of God was like this sorcerer – stern face, hooked nose, always watching me to see whether I was going to be good or bad.

If I did something bad, this “god” would send lightning down out of his fingertips and turn part of my heart black. And in my childhood mind, I thought that, once I died and went to heaven, if my heart was more pink than black I would go to heaven, and if it was more black than pink would go to hell.

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Now, remember, I don’t believe like that anymore! But at the time my reasoning was like the Jews of Jesus’ day – “We are already good. We are the children of Abraham. We have it all set. We just have to keep ourselves separated from evil and not do bad stuff, and we’re all in.”

But that is not the Good News!

The Good News starts with bad news – we are lost! We are broken. We are deep in the pit, and we can do nothing to get ourselves out of it!

Satan wants for us to think that, if we just do enough good works and be nice to our family and love our country (France, England, USA, whatever), then we’re fine and we don’t need anything else.

But the truth is, we are lost. We cannot save ourselves; most people don’t even realize how lost they are.

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So here's the Good News – Christ came for us! We have a way out! The God who created us wants for us to live with Him in joy forever! He has come to provide a road back to Him!

The Good News for us is bad news for some – for those who want to believe that they can earn their salvation, for those who think that entry into heaven is either something they can gain or something that they have by birthright; for those who want to exclude others and say that they don't have souls or they can never come to salvation. For those who want to limit who is welcome in heaven, this is not good news at all! God will just let anyone in!

Yes, God will let just anyone in. Anyone who turns to Him and says, "***Jesus, I need You. I am making a mess of it; I need help. Please take me as Your own. I surrender myself to You.***"

That is the prayer of salvation. I'm going to leave it up here on the screen for a moment. I believe that there are some here today who want to pray this prayer. You may have been to church all of your life, or maybe this is your first time – but God has been working on you over these past few weeks and especially this morning – and you realize that it's time to make a decision.

Will you trust in Jesus, or will you keep trying to flounder around on your own? Jesus is calling you, right now, and says, "I will hold you."

We're going to have a moment of silence now, and as we do, I invite you to come forward up here to our prayer rail if you would like to pray. It may be for yourself, or for somebody that you love. You are welcome at Jesus' table, and you are welcome here.

Up in the front we have our baptismal font – it's the symbol of belonging to Christ. If you have never been baptized and you want to make that decision right now, I invite you to come forward and to make that commitment. If you have been baptized before and you want to re-affirm your promise to Him, you are also invited to come and share in the water.

¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

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

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,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ 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.²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

²³ Jesus said to them, "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.'"

²⁴ "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵I 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. ²⁶Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷And 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."

²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff.³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.