

Natalie W. Bell
January 23, 2022

***What's Our Mission?
Luke 4:14-21***

Luke 4:14-21 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.

15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

16 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,

17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

18 "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,

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

20 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.

21 Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

My Dad had a **saying**.

Do the right thing, at the right time, for the right reason.

It was like his **mission** statement.

Ever heard of **Rick Warren's** book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*?

It's about how we each have a purpose—where we **join what God is doing**—and it's our duty to **discover that mission**.

In 1 Corinthians 12 today, we hear that **part of our mission is using our talents** as a member of the church, the body of Christ.

We use what we know how to do, for the common good.

We are each a body part, essential to the whole.

I wonder, do you feel like you have a **mission statement**?

Wherever you find yourself **right now**?

Do you feel like **you are joining what God is doing** in the world—

In some way?

What about our church, *FPC Matawan*?

We have a mission statement on the back of the bulletin—

But, do we ***know*** it? Are we ***living*** it?

Is it still the mission of the church, or is there a new focus?

These are important questions.

This Luke 4 passage today is basically ***Jesus' mission statement***.

You would think it would be one of the most ***famous verses***—but it's not.

Luke puts this story ***front and center***

at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

The words are ***Jesus' vision for his ministry***, his purpose.

And it's not even something new, the passage is from the prophet ***Isaiah***,

but it's never been ***embodied*** in a person like this before.

Jesus reads the prophecy

and then says *this has been fulfilled in your hearing today*.

In other words, this is ***who I am***.

Now imagine the ***scene***:

Luke says that Jesus had been preaching and teaching,

but this is the ***first and only*** time his teaching is recorded

in his hometown of Nazareth.

In other words, the ***congregation is mostly family and friends***.

They know him.

Oh yes, that's Mary and Joseph's boy--You know, the carpenter.

And now he's a teacher! Good for him!

I was reading about a ***typical synagogue service*** at this time.

It would begin with what we would consider a call to worship,

Like reciting the ***The Shema***—which we would know as Deuteronomy 6:4-9,
which starts: *Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.*

***5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your might....***

It's one of the ***oldest known daily prayers*** of Judaism.

The people in the synagogue would recite the Shema,

and ***pray*** facing towards Jerusalem.

Then they would have a ***response***,

much as we have responses in our liturgy, ending with **Amen**.
 Then there would be a **reading** from the Torah or the prophets
 Then a **sermon**
 Then a **benediction to close**.

E. Yamauchi, "Synagogue" in Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downers Grove: IL, Intervarsity Press, 1992), 782.

Historically, we don't have many accounts of such services in Jesus' day.
 But that's what we have here in Luke 4.
 According to I. Howard Marshall, this passage may be the
 '**oldest known account of a synagogue service**'
 (The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, 181.)

What Jesus says and does, is very **simple**,
 And incredibly **powerful**.
 At that time, readers would take a **scroll** of scripture
 and unroll it to read a particular passage.
 Readers could be assigned, or **any male** could be asked to read or preach.

And this would have been a **familiar passage**,
 from Isaiah 61, verses 1 and 2a.
 (Jesus omits the latter half of verse 2 about God's vengeance).
So Jesus takes the scroll, and reads: "*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, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*"

Jesus does this **reading, and a sermon, all rolled into one**.
 For after he reads it,
he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, sat down.
And as everyone watched—he said:
"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

So this is Jesus identity and mission— He's saying: **I am the Messiah**.
 I am the Savior you've been expecting.
 And I've come to bring **good news, release, sight, freedom,**
 And **new beginnings!**
 And you know what?
 This **didn't go over well**.
 Because these are friends and family in the congregation.

They've watched him grow up.
 They know him—
 and they ***don't know him as*** the long-awaited Messiah!
 So of course, he is rejected by those closest to him,
 Even though his revelation is ***GOOD*** news!
 His ***first*** sermon in Nazareth is his ***last*** sermon there.

Jesus even ***predicts how they will reject*** him, right before they do:
 He tells them that ***a prophet is not accepted*** in his hometown...
 Then, in verse 29 The people ***got up, drove him out of town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30 But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.***

Jesus told them his ***mission***,
 And it wasn't what they expected, so they were not happy!

The question for us today is what's ***our mission?***
 And—how does it ***compare*** to His?
 And are we willing to ***stick with it***, even when times are tough?

Remember the question ***W.W.J.D.—What Would Jesus Do?***
 What if that's still a ***great question?***

What ***WOULD*** Jesus do in our shoes, today?
And how are we involved with what God is doing in our world today?
 How are we bringing ***good news?***
 Or helping people be released from ***captivity?***
 How do we help people to see ***truth***,
 How do we free people from ***oppression?***
 How do we help people have a ***fresh start*** in life?

A mission statement is not just what we ***WANT to do---***
 A true mission statement for a Christian
 is what ***God has CALLED us to do!***
What is that for you? For us?

Jesus' mission is not just some good things he wants to accomplish.
 It is what ***God wants to do through him.***

So, how does our mission *compare to his*?

Pastor Tom Harvey, a Presbyterian missionary in Singapore says, "***Mission catches you up in the life and vitality of God, for it is God who relentlessly draws men and women to him in love and compassion...when we step away from mission, there is a corresponding depletion of life and vitality in the church.***" Quoted by Robert Brearley in Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 1, pg. 286.

Mission catches us up in the *life and vitality of God*...

What is bringing the life and vitality of God to ***this church***?

How do we find our ***mission***?

What if we come to it the ***same way*** Jesus did?

In Luke 4 it says:

*Then Jesus, filled with the power of the **Spirit**, returned to Galilee...*

and then the Isaiah reading says,

*The **Spirit** of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me!*

So, what if the ***Holy Spirit*** directs us to ***our mission***?

The Holy Spirit is ***central*** to Jesus' mission—

and in the Gospel of Luke this is the ***3rd***

time that Luke mentions Jesus being full of the Spirit.

The ***first*** time is when the Spirit descends like a dove at his ***baptism***, the ***2nd*** is when ***Jesus was led*** by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted for 40 days.

And now, for the ***3rd time***, Jesus is filled with the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit MUST be ***key*** to finding our mission!

Unfortunately, the Holy Spirit is often the overlooked member of the Trinity in our denomination.

We tend to be more ***analytical***, intellectual and introverted...

We are sometimes afraid of what we ***don't understand***—

like the ***mystery*** of the Holy Spirit.

But the Holy Spirit is ***what Jesus promised his followers*** after his death and resurrection—to give us His power!

The whole book of ***Acts*** (which is the 2nd half of Luke)

is about the power of the Holy Spirit in the early church.
It's no accident that Luke mentions ***Jesus being filled with the Spirit.***

We need the Spirit, today, don't we?
What if we can ***plug in to the Spirit's power?***
like a cord gets plugged into a power ***outlet?***

What if we can easily do that? With just a prayer?

The Spirit is available to all of us, the question is,
Are we asking for that power, through prayer?

Prayer is key.

Jesus was a person of prayer.
He grew up in a household full of prayer.
That he went to synagogue and prayed.
We read throughout the gospels that he went away alone often to pray,
And he taught his disciples to pray, in the Lord's Prayer.
Jesus was a person of prayer.

The question is, ***are we people of prayer?***

That's THE way we can plug into the Holy Spirit's power.

We must go to God—in prayer.
We need to ask the ***Spirit to show us the way---***
to find our mission, and carry it out.

Now this can seem easier said than done.

If prayer is not easy or familiar to you,
Try this.

Just ask God to help you pray.

In Romans 8, Paul reminds us that when we don't have the words—
you know who does? ***The Holy Spirit, who can pray for us!***

Prayer is not just us asking God for what we want.
It's not just talking to God.

Prayer is a reciprocal ***relationship***, where we offer ourselves,
and we receive the help and power we need—to live,
And to live out God's call on our lives.

We **cannot know** our mission without prayer.
We **cannot live out** our mission without prayer.

Jesus had a mission.

And **we have a mission**, as his followers.

And the way we live that mission is through the power of the Holy **Spirit**.

A power we receive through **prayer**.

May we **plug into** the Holy Spirit, through prayer,

And follow God's mission for us in the world.

That is the path to life, to hope, to joy.

And for that, all God's people can say together, Amen.