

"First Day on the Job" 17.Jan.10

Luke 4:14-21 (Isaiah 61:1-2)

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So here's a question: If you were to stand in front of a crowd of people who have been important in your life...and throw in several dozen people for good measure...and then you were to make a presentation introducing yourself plus your plans and goals for the coming time, what would you say? What hope and purpose would you offer? It is an important question because what you say at that moment will be what drives you in the coming months and years; or hopefully it will be.

This is akin to what happens when a new CEO is installed at a company; or when a new President or state governor or city mayor is installed or inaugurated; or when a Region calls a new Regional Minister; or when an organization brings in a new leader; or when a pastor in the search process is asked by a church to come for an on-site visit to preach and then speak to the Church Board members. Interestingly enough, some of you will remember this is what happened to me on my final visit here before you voted. Even *more* interesting...I could suggest it is rather what Jesus did in the synagogue in Nazareth on this day, as recorded by Luke.

Jesus uses a scripture passage from Isaiah to validate His coming ministry. Curious that John the Baptist does the same thing. He quotes Isaiah: "[I am] a voice crying in the wilderness... prepare the way of the Lord." The Gospel of Luke has both John the Baptist and Jesus employing passages in Isaiah as warrant for their ministry. (*See Luke 3:4-6; Isaiah 40:3-5; Isaiah 61.*) (Sidebar: this is another reason why I believe those who call themselves strictly "New Testament Christians" might do well to reconsider. Our Lord's heritage was Hebrew scripture and so is ours. But moving right along...)

Taking a page from those booklets called *Cliff Notes*, here is today's story in a nutshell. Jesus defeats Satan's last temptation and now comes out of the wilderness. He travels to His hometown of Nazareth. On the Sabbath He goes to the synagogue and begins teaching. He quotes from the prophet Isaiah, saying that He, *now*, is the fulfillment; God's ambassador; Messiah. There are no loud trumpets. No large Marine Band. No cheering crowds. No home-made placards reading "Jesus is No. 1," or "Jesus is the Man," or "Jesus will Please Us!" At first the people are more than pleased with Him—a "hometown boy made good." *Then* Jesus says that God sometimes favors the Gentiles over the Jews! Not the best thing to say. Suddenly the people turn angry at Him. They try to kick Him out of town, intending to do Him serious harm.

Many see this passage as Jesus' "inaugural speech" for His first day on the job. We should know that no "first day on the job" speech is (or could ever be) exhaustive in content. However, it should be representational of the person: (a) what he or she will do and (b) how he or she will be. Though Jesus' speech was not accompanied by extensive media coverage, huge crowds, several parades, and 5-star formal receptions, it did contain five main elements indicating what was to come:

1. It indicated there is now a major transition.
2. It set a clear sense of direction
3. It included a vision of where and how Jesus would lead His people
4. It foreshadowed how the people He would serve could join in and help, and
5. It included the "values" Jesus would employ along the way.

So let's look again at what Jesus indicates. # 1. the holy Spirit of God will rest on Him in a way it does not rest on anyone else. He will carry God's eternal Truth and Wisdom; not just *any* truth or wisdom of the secular world. # 2. He will bring good news to the poor. Jesus will bring the clear presence of God into the lives of the broken-hearted, the saddened, the destitute, the forsaken, the lonely. # 3. He will proclaim release to the captives. Of course Jesus does not intend to open all the jail doors for everyone incarcerated. What He intends to do is free people from their emotional and moral jail cells;

free those held prisoner by things like secular values or social seductions or a depleted spirit. He means to free people from the captivity of the Evil One who wants to grab them out of God's freedom and slam them into hellish prisons. # 4. He will bring sight to the blind. Not only will Jesus physically heal the blind, but, even more importantly, He will also heal their "spiritual" blindness. Remember the story of the blind man at Bethsaida? (See Mark 8:22f.) Jesus cured his physical blindness in the hopes of healing his "spiritual blindness." # 5. He will free the oppressed. Messiah will "set free" people living under the oppressive rule of damaged emotions and mental anguish so their hearts and minds may be unburdened. # 6. He will proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (*The Year of Jubilee," Lev. 25.*) Jesus will tell everyone of God's blessings and favors; that the age of Messiah has come to them.

His "inaugural speech" on His 1st day on the job set the standards for His ministry, and we, too, are called to that same mission. What a privilege it is for Christ to entrust to us His mission! In spite of all the negative, depressing news, we *are* doing it.

1. Just look at the world-wide response to events like the Tsunami, and now Haiti; the incredible outpouring of love, care, money, necessities, and prayers!
2. Or how about the 100,000s of people who repeatedly give blood for people they know not.
3. Or how about national programs like Habitat for Humanity, and Christmas in April, and Easter Seals, and United Way, and Meals on Wheels, and Teen Challenge, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and Cub Packs and Brownies, and PTA's, and Junior Leagues, and more; organizations that rely on the blessing and goodwill of people like you and me to make the lives of others better!
4. Or how about the total dollar amount for last year (2009) that you and Memorial collected and then gave away to help—almost \$68,000!

- to help bring good news to the poor
- to help give people release from emotional,

- physical, and spiritual bondage
- to help those who cannot see
to finally see with their heart and spirit
- and to help free the captives...!

A mind-boggling amount of money for a church our size! If things like these are not pictures of Christ's ongoing ministry through us, then someone please catch me after worship and tell me what is!

You see, the gospel is never just "advice": we "might" do this, or we "could" do that, or we "would do well" to consider such and such, or it is "suggested" we tackle this. God did not give Jesus "advice"...or at least so I believe. And neither does the Lord give *us* "advice." What Christ does give us is a mission...*His* mission.

Each day Jesus asks us, "Who will you touch today in My name?" Just as "...the Spirit of the LORD was upon Jesus," so, too, is it upon you and me. So let us change the pronoun in this passage and speak it aloud right now...together...

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon us,
because He has anointed us
to bring good news to the poor.
He 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."

And all God's people say, "Amen."