

McCabe United Methodist Church

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“It’s an Announcement”

Luke 4:14-21

Not all surprises are good ones, at least at first glance. It was Jesus who had that uncanny ability to catch people by surprise. That was often the way of his parables. This did not always leave people pleased about what he had to say. For example, the surprise Jesus brought to the Nazarene congregation in our scripture for today. It has Jesus returning to his hometown on the Sabbath day. He goes to the synagogue, as was his custom. The synagogues of Jesus’ day often had lay persons read the Scripture for that Sabbath. So any adult male might be called on to read and maybe even teach about the lesson. That was a huge responsibility, but remember, they had all gone to the synagogue school and were trained in the scriptures. Thus, as the time came to read the Scriptures the scrolls of Isaiah were handed to Jesus to read and share the lesson. It was Isaiah 61, that Messianic passage of great importance to the Hebrew people, and he read. Read Luke’s account - 4:14-21.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

And then, when Jesus was sure he had everyone’s attention, he closed the scroll, sat down, and announced very simply, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” You talk about an abrupt halt. You talk about surprise. This is it! **It is an announcement!**

The prophet of Isaiah was inspired to write those words some 700 years before. It had been now seven centuries that the Israelite rabbi’s and teachers of the law had spoken of the coming of a Messiah. This Messiah would turn the world’s systems upside-down. Would lift up the hurting, the oppressed, the blind. The Hebrew people knew only too well what it was to suffer, to be held captive. So they had waited all too long for this prophecy to be fulfilled. And so! Here is this poor, no-name carpenter comes claiming to be the Messiah who would “proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” Think about this. How would we react if we were in their shoes? Is it any wonder that latter in this story the men of the synagogue try to kill Jesus? Fortunately he got away.

As Dr. Paul S. Rees says, **“The Gospel is neither a discussion nor a debate. It is an announcement!”** And that is exactly how Jesus treated it. He didn’t explain or argue, he just announced this mind-boggling piece of information and let the worshipers make up their own minds. What is interesting is that if we take that same passage seriously today, it has the same potential to blow our minds too. This announcement has three things to teach us about God.

First, our God is a God of hope. Just listen to those words again:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

When we look at the scriptures, we find that wherever Jesus went, he brought hope. A sense of

hope was Jesus' calling-card.

-He brought hope to the leper, exiled from his home and community.

-He brought hope to the paralyzed man who was unable to care for his family.

-To people who felt worthless, or lost, or broken, or rejected or beyond saving, Jesus brought the message that God loved them—that they had a purpose in life.

-Even in Jesus' last moments, when he was dying in agony on the cross, he offered the hope of eternal salvation to the thief dying beside him.

-So, we might say that this was Jesus' first act in life and his last act before death—the giving of hope.

Some of us that are middle-aged who had to read the classic, titled Inferno, by Dante, you may remember how the author imagines that the entrance to Hell is marked by a sign, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." While on the other hand Jesus comes proclaiming that - Where God is, there is hope; where God is absent, there is no hope.

Secondly, Jesus' announcement tells us that our God is a God of justice. While most world religions operate on a very simple assumption: you get what you deserve in this life. Saying, if you are poor, God must want you to be poor. If you're sick or disabled, you are being punished for your sins, maybe even sins you've committed in a past life. That my friends is a simple but flawed equation: to say health and wealth are blessings from God. And if you don't have health or wealth, then God must not love you. This is certainly not true.

Instead, we must remember that Jesus came to turn this world view upside down. No longer does might equal right. He came to declare that God loves the poor, the blind, the sick, the oppressed even more because of their humble state. My friends, if you don't remember anything else from this message, remember this: **There are no rejects in God's economy.** Jesus came announcing that the riches on earth are meaningless; it is treasures in Heaven for which we should be striving. He also showed that a healthy body is worthless if one's soul is dead in sin. Jesus also declared that a person could have 20/20 vision and still be spiritually blind.

Finally, Jesus' announcement tells us that our God is a God of freedom. In Jesus' day, there were slaves who surely thought that they were made to be slaves, that God had ordained them to be inferior; their oppression was inevitable. BUT Jesus continually demonstrated that God is a God of freedom, not bondage. As Jesus walked this earth, he rebuked the power structures that oppressed people. It was his practice to set people free. He freed sick people of their diseases. Those disabled from their handicaps. Sinners from the burdens of their sins. And the demon-possessed people from their torment. The announcement of the Gospel, broke the chains of fear, confusion, and anxiety in the lives of the people Jesus touched. My friends, our God is a God of freedom. And he can free each of us in similar ways.

Some of us are living in prison cells of our own making. We are bound by addictions, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, fear, guilt, and misconceptions about God. There may be those times when you feel lucky to make it through the day without collapsing from the weight of the chains that bind you. But listen! Jesus tells us that we were not made to live that way. The great Christian writer, Oswald Chambers writes, "*The Spirit of God is always the spirit of liberty; the spirit that is not of God is the spirit of bondage, the spirit of oppression and depression. . . God who made the birds never made birdcages: it is men who make birdcages, and after a while we become cramped and can do nothing but chirp and stand on one leg.*"

When we get out into God's great free life, we discover that is the way God meant us to live—'the glorious liberty of the children of God.' (By Lori Hoewing-Magie, May 9, 2000 via <http://www.witandwisom.org>)

The Spirit of God is always a spirit of liberty." That's what God is all about. God is about hope; God about justice; God is about freedom. It was a surprise to Jesus' listeners 2000 years ago, and if we really think about it, it is a surprise announcement to us today. And YES, Jesus came to share the good news that God cares about our hopelessness, our oppression, our bondage. And someday Christ will return to establish an eternal Kingdom where those things don't exist.

Until then, let us pray for the presence of God's Holy Spirit to guide us and continually remind us that God loves us. And the announcement for today is: *It is God's love that can set us free from those things that bind us and enslave us.* Thanks Be to God!!