

Sermon on Luke 4:14-21

The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Me

First of all, I want to remind you of some of the context of these verses in Luke. Our reading stops a little short, whilst at first the people are amazed at Jesus words and His teaching, they are immediately offended by Him and then try to throw Him off a cliff. All three synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke record Jesus returning to His hometown, Nazareth and the people rejecting Him and saying things like, Isn't this Joseph the carpenter's son? Who does He think He is? And this is also reflected in John's Gospel right at the beginning when John says, He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him.

Matthew and Mark place the incident later in Jesus' ministry but whilst it might appear at first glance that Luke is saying this happened as soon as Jesus returned from being tempted in the wilderness, in fact it is clear from verse 14 and 15 that Jesus had already been teaching all around Galilee. Word about Him had already spread throughout the countryside, He had been teaching in the synagogues and everyone was praising Him. It is interesting to note that Luke tells us that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, who had come upon Him at His Baptism, when he went out into the desert. Having resisted Satan, He returned to begin His Ministry, full of the Power of the Holy Spirit. He had been tested and had overcome temptation and evil and as a result was filled with Power of the Spirit to enable Him in His ministry. Whatever God gives us to do, we are wise to ask to be equipped with the Power of the Holy Spirit rather than try to do it in our own strength. This is possible, not because we can, on our own, overcome evil but because Jesus already has and we are in Him and he is in us.

Now before I go on I just want to say a bit about synagogues. The Jewish synagogue institution began during the exile when the Jews couldn't worship at the Temple and of course it continues today. Any 10 male Jews could come

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together and start a synagogue. In Jesus' time they were not just places of worship but also schools, community centres, and the places where justice was administered. They were lay led, with no priest or altar. The Pharisees were prominent leaders of the synagogues at the time and instructed the people on how they were to keep the law, more than that they burdened them with many rules and traditions.

Jesus said that He had not come to abolish the Law given to Moses but to fulfil it. He was an observant Jew – the only Jew, the only person ever to perfectly keep the ten commandments. He was immersed in and upheld the Jewish traditions, whilst at the same time transcending them and making it clear that to serve God and love others was to keep the Spirit of the law and keeping the letter of the law was sometimes to go against the spirit of the law. For example, He would speak to and even touch Gentile women, heal on the Sabbath, not observe ritual washing etc. He fulfilled the true law but rejected all the man-made religious rules that had grown up around it.

But to go back to our passage. Wherever he went Jesus would go to the Synagogue, read from the scriptures, and teach. On this occasion He took the scroll and read from the book of Isaiah 61 verses one and two.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon 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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. He then began His teaching with the words, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." At first, they liked what they were hearing, but Jesus went on to talk about how in Elijah's time, when the famine came, Elijah wasn't sent to a Jewish widow but to a gentile one. Then He talked about how Elisha did not heal any Jew who had leprosy but Naaman the Syrian.

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The crowd turned on Him at this point. They did not want to hear about a God that was concerned with gentiles, they had completely separated themselves from all other people groups. They would never even speak to a gentile if they didn't have to and to touch one would make them unclean. The Good news that Jesus was anointed to proclaim was for everyone, not just for the Jews. Jesus was to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. This is a clear reference to the Old Testament practice of having a Jubilee year every 7 years as described in Leviticus. It was a year in which all loans and debts were wiped out. All property was returned to those it belonged to, everyone got a clean slate and a new start. Of course, this was meant to symbolise God's forgiveness and the debts that Jesus had come to forgive were our sins. To say that He was fulfilling this prophesy was Jesus saying that He is God and has come to set us free from the oppression of sin and guilt. When they thought about it this would have further incensed the Jews, especially the pharisees.

So, what does all this mean for us today? Well, I said right at the beginning that it is possible for us to do God's work in the power of the Holy Spirit, because we are in Jesus, and He is in us. We minister to others in His name. But what is this work that we are supposed to do. Well, we are Jesus' representatives, we are supposed to do exactly what He did. Proclaim the Good News of God's love so that people who are still captives, prisoners of sin and guilt can be set free. Yes, Jesus gave physical sight to the blind but the miracles He performed were signs that pointed to spiritual truths. The most important thing is that those who are spiritually blind can be enabled to see the truth that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Holy One the Son of God and He loves each one of us and calls each one of us to minister His love and saving grace to others in His name and in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of

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the Lord is on us, because we are anointed to proclaim Good News to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of God's favour. Just How He wants you to do that might be different to how he wants me to do it. But we are all called to share in His ministry of love, forgiveness, freedom and reconciliation.