

Hear the Good News

[Read Luke 4:14-21 NRSV]

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. ¹⁶When 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, ¹⁷and 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, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” ²⁰And 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. ²¹Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Opening Image

Today I am going to talk about a subject that we rarely talk about in the UMC. I am going to talk about sin. What is sin? Sin is defined as disobedience especially disobedience to God. Sin is doing something that we know that we should not be doing yet we do it anyway. Some sins are unintentional like hurting someone’s feelings without knowing it. Other sins are cruel and malicious intending to hurt others.

How hard is it to admit that we sinned? The world teaches us to avoid admitting to our sins. **OJ Simpson** pleaded not guilty to killing his wife and then he wrote a book titled “If I did it.” **Richard Nixon**, when asked about the Watergate break-in told a nationwide TV audience, “I am not a crook.”

Bill Clinton, when asked about his alleged adultery said, "I did not have relations with that woman, Miss Lewensky, these allegations are false."

Hide our sins

When our children tell a lie we usually punish them. Eventually our children learn to hide their sins. Adults learn the same message, don't get caught or you will be punished. You have heard the commercial advertising Las Vegas or Sin City, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas."

Remember Adam and Eve? When they sinned against God they tried to hide from God. God found them and they were punished. What do we learn from this? The bottom line is if you do something wrong, don't confess, and don't get caught.

Covering up a sin by lying

How many of us have lied to others because of some sin that we committed? What are we thinking when we tell a lie to cover up another lie? Sometimes when we tell lies we think that we are avoiding the consequences of our actions.

As time goes by the lies get bigger and bigger and more difficult to maintain as we try to cover up our sins. We are weighed down by the guilt. If we had only told the truth earlier and asked for forgiveness. Finally, the lies catch up to us and then we must face the consequences.

Hard to Forgive

Now let's look at the other side of the coin. How hard is it to forgive? The world teaches us to get even when someone harms us or harms someone we love. Imagine a world where there is no forgiveness.

We all know that feeling, that feeling of being wronged. The anger of being treated unfairly rises up in our hearts. We begin to think about our own terms for justice. We want to punish the offender. We want retribution not reconciliation. We think this will make us feel better. In the Old Testament the law spoke of justice in the form of an eye for an eye. The problem with this kind of justice is that it makes everyone blind.

Prisoners of Sin

We are all prisoners of sin whether the sin is failure to forgive or failure to confess our sins. We have been told in scripture that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are all slaves to sin which leads to spiritual death.

Paul laments this human condition by saying, "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death" (Rom 7:21-24)? Who will rescue Paul and us from the captivity of sin?

Intro to Narrative

Our scripture lesson today tells us that Jesus releases us from the power of sin. The message of forgiveness and reconciliation is the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ!

Jesus has been baptized by John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit has descended upon him. Jesus is lead by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days to prepare for his ministry on earth.

During his 40 days of fasting and prayer he is tempted by Satan to sin against God. Satan tempts Jesus to take a different path than God's plan. Satan tempts us to follow our will instead of God's will. Satan's plans for Jesus rely on political force and displays of power. Satan's plans for us rely on our seeking power for ourselves.

God's plans rely on self-sacrificial love and non-violence. Jesus rejects Satan's plans and remains sinless. When we fall to Satan's plans we are trapped by sin. Although Jesus is tempted to follow his own will, he humbly submits to God's will.

Full of the Holy Spirit

Jesus returns from the temptations in the wilderness full of the power of the Holy Spirit and goes to Galilee. This is the same Holy Spirit that overshadows Mary, the same Holy Spirit that causes Elizabeth to speak prophetically about Jesus, the same Holy Spirit that descends on Jesus at his baptism, and the same Holy Spirit that gave birth to the church at

Pentecost. Jesus' mission is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit just as the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus in the Synagogue

Jesus goes to the synagogue in Nazareth as was his custom. It is part of Jesus' normal routine to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath and worship God. Sounds like a good routine we could all emulate.

Jesus is handed the scroll of Isaiah to read. He reads parts of Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6. The main theme of the scripture passage is **release**. The passage in Isaiah proclaims **release** for the captives, **release** from blindness, **release** from oppression, and the year of the Lord's favor.

Jubilee Year

The year of the Lord's favor is the Jubilee year which is **release** from debt. This is explained in Leviticus chapter 25. Every 50 years slaves are freed, debts are canceled, and all land is returned to the original families because no one owns the land except God. The slates are wiped clean, the past is in the past, and everyone is **released** from debt.

Forgiveness is release

Forgiveness is a **release** from debt. The Greek word for release is *aphesis*. It is the same word used by Luke for forgiveness of sins. In Zechariah's song we are told that Jesus will "give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:77).

We were created in the image of God to be in communion with God. Our sins disrupt our relationship with God. Sin is the primary weapon of Satan used to hold us captive (Luke 13:16). God the Father sends Jesus to us to break the power of sin and reconcile us with God.

Inaugural Address

Jesus comes to his hometown of Nazareth to deliver God's plans for all of God's people. He sits down to teach about the passage from Isaiah and the eyes of everyone are on him. He makes the astonishing statement that the scriptures have been fulfilled today. What does he mean by saying the scriptures have been fulfilled?

Jesus, led by the Holy Spirit, has just given his inaugural address. We know that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and he is here on a mission from God. He has proclaimed his God given mission to: (1) give good news to the poor, (2) freedom for prisoners, (3) recovery of sight for the blind, (4) release for the oppressed, and (5) to proclaim the Jubilee year. This is good news for all.

The kingdom of God has been initiated on earth. Think about the **Lord's Prayer** where it says, "Thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." God the Father has answered our prayers. God's will to release us from the power of sin and death has been initiated by Jesus through his ministry.

Actions

What does Jesus do to inaugurate the Kingdom of God? He puts his words into actions. He doesn't just give out pleasant platitudes; he shows everyone what God will do.

He begins his itinerant ministry by going to Capernaum where he encounters a demonic man. The man is possessed and held captive by evil spirits. The evil spirits address Jesus as the Son of God and asks what Jesus will do. Jesus tells the evil spirits to be quiet and to come out of the man. The evil spirits leave the man and all the people are amazed. Jesus has begun his mission to release the captives. ***The Good News is that Jesus has power over evil.***

Healing

The next thing that he does is heal Simon Peter's mother-in-law. It seems that she is being held captive by a high fever and probably bed ridden. Jesus rebukes the fever and it leaves her. She is released from the captivity of the sickness and immediately responds by serving. ***The Good News is not reserved for special people.***

The power of Jesus to heal and release us from any captivity is for all people, men and women alike. Jesus heals many others in the area and continues to travel and preach the Good News from God the Father.

Outsiders

The next thing that Jesus does is heal a man who has leprosy. Lepers were outsiders. People with leprosy were removed from their community and sent to a leper colony. No one could touch them, or they would become unclean.

Jesus does the unthinkable. Instead of healing the man with words he reaches out and touches the man to heal him. The leprous man is not only healed but restored to his community and family. ***The Good News is not just for the pious but for outsiders as well.***

Forgiveness

Finally, Jesus makes it clear that healing is not limited to the physical but also touches the spiritual as well. Some men carry a paralyzed man to Jesus so he can be healed (Luke 5:17-26).

Jesus is moved by the faith of the men carrying the paralyzed man. Jesus does not say anything about the faith of the paralyzed man. The paralyzed man does not even speak to ask for healing or forgiveness. This is where we learn about prevenient grace where God acts first.

God takes the initiative and reaches out to the sinner. Jesus heals the paralytic man and tells him to go home and that his sins are forgiven. He responds by going home and praising God. This man is restored to his community not only physically but also spiritually. His previous life has been

cleansed of sin. He has been released. ***The Good News is that Jesus hears and responds to the faith of friends.***

Good News

Hear the Good News. God takes the initiative to forgive us of our sins. Think about it. God is wronged every time we sin, but God does something that is unique. Even though God is the party that is wronged, God extends the hand of forgiveness.

God does not seek revenge. Even though God is a God of justice and must punish sins, God is also a God of love and mercy. God sends his only Son into the world to take on the sins of the world.

Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Jesus is obedient to God's will and does not sin. Jesus dies on the cross for our past sins, present sins, and future sins. Your sins and my sins are covered by the blood of Jesus.

Church is different

The church is different from the world in that it teaches confession, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. God's mercy and grace are always reaching out to us if we will only repent of our sins.

We carry the burden of sin with us in our daily lives until we repent and seek forgiveness. God provides forgiveness before we become aware of our sins because God loves us. Isn't that a great feeling? God knows that we need forgiveness and provides abundantly.

God's law enables us to realize that we are sinners. God's grace and mercy enables us to repent and change our lives. God's forgiveness enables us to start over with a clean slate. Forgiveness enables reconciliation. How do we respond to this free and unmerited gift of forgiveness?

Our Response

Hear the Good News; Jesus has released us from the power of sin enabling us to seek forgiveness and to forgive. The Lord's Prayer ends with, "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us" (Luke 11:4).

Hear the Good News

Have you sinned against God? **Hear the Good News,** Jesus Christ has released you, repent and seek forgiveness. Have you sinned against your neighbor? **Hear the Good News,** Jesus Christ has released you, repent and seek forgiveness. Do you have guilt that is weighing you down today over something that happened in the past? **Hear the Good News,** Jesus Christ has released you, repent and seek forgiveness. Finally, have you refused to forgive someone? **Hear the Good News,** Jesus Christ has released you, repent and seek forgiveness. **In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen**

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