

Message: Believe with Share

A pastor was teaching children and asked them some questions.

“If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into heaven?” the pastor asked the children.

“NO!” the children answered.

“If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?”

The answer: “NO!”

“Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children, and loved my spouse, would that get me into heaven?”

Again, the children answered, “NO!”

“Well, then how can I get into heaven?” the pastor asked.

A five-year-old shouted, “YOU GOTTA BE DEAD!!!”¹

Are we just putting our time in until we die to see where we end up or is there more to life? That’s a question that comes out when we read our scripture passage for today, Luke 4:14-21. God gives us a great gift and the way we receive it affects the way we live.

One of the challenges of reading the Bible silently and by ourselves is that we may not really get what’s being said. That’s one of the reasons why we read scripture together out loud. It’s good to read scripture with a group and then talk about what you heard. When we listen to different translations we hear different interpretations. I’m going to ask you to join me in reading the passage again. We’re reading from The Message:

“Jesus returned to Galilee powerful in the Spirit. News that he was back spread through the countryside. He taught in their meeting places to everyone’s acclaim and pleasure.

He came to Nazareth where he had been reared. As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place. When he stood up to read, he was

¹ www.stewardshipoflife.org

handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written,

God’s Spirit is on me;

*God’s chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor,
Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and
recovery of sight to the blind,
To set the burdened and battered free,
to announce, ‘This is God’s year to act!’*

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the place was on him, intent. Then he started in, ‘You’ve just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place.’”

What do you hear when we read that passage together?

There are a lot of interesting points. I’ll bet there’s some you want to ask about. For example, did you notice Jesus was handed the book of Isaiah? Jesus didn’t choose the book, but he did find the most important passage for that congregation to hear at that time, Isaiah 61:1-2.

Or, how about this: Jesus was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. That connects with the passage in Isaiah *“God’s Spirit is on me”* – the “me” in that passage is Lord. We know that from the verse that precedes it, which says, *“I am God. At the right time I’ll make it happen”* (Isaiah 60:22, MSG).

It was time. This was a God moment. Jesus was in his home town with the people he knew the best. He normally went to synagogue on Sunday, so he was there. They asked Jesus to speak because of all the good things they were hearing about him. He read a specific passage about God’s promise. Then he sat down and waited. All eyes were on him. Expectations were high.

What was Jesus going to say? Jesus read the passage from Isaiah. Then he said, *“Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it”* (v21, CEB).

Did you hear it? Jesus said the most amazing thing!

What was fulfilled? God’s promise.

What did God promise? God promised to send an anointed one who would make things right. Another word for anointed one is Messiah. God was telling us that a Messiah would come to set people free, care for us and lead us.

When Jesus says, “You’ve just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place,” what’s he saying?

Jesus is the Messiah! He’s the One promised by God more than 700 years earlier. What a great gift! That’s a clear statement of Jesus’ identity. He shared it with those who knew him the best: his family, friends and the neighbors he grew up with.

Why did Jesus do that? To give us hope. We can trust God because God keeps promises. Even better, God promises to show us favor.

“God’s favor” is a loaded expression. It comes with specific meaning in some cultures and portions of our society. One of my favorite songs is by Israel & New Breed. They sing the song “Favor of the Lord.” Here are the lyrics:

“It’s my season for the favor of the Lord
Soul is thirsty for an outpour
I am standing on the promises of God
Everything he has for me I receive
I am blessed to be a blessing
I have a promise, a promise from Heaven
It’s my season, it’s my time for the favor of the Lord
Pressed down shaken it together
Running over in the favor of God”²

God’s favor is God’s welcome, God’s blessing, God’s grace.

All people are acceptable and loved in God’s kingdom and all are equal in God’s eyes.

² <https://genius.com/Israel-and-new-breed-favor-of-the-lord-lyrics>

Jesus revealed something very special in Nazareth. It’s something that our soul craves. We need to believe in something that goes beyond what we can see and beyond what we can do with our own hands. We need to believe there’s some greater meaning and purpose to life. We need to believe there’s a higher power that cares about us.

There is. His name is Jesus, the Son of God, Immanuel, God with us. He’s God in flesh, the One who came to be with us so we’d be saved from ourselves and the spiritual forces of darkness.

But there’s more. By reading the passage from Isaiah 61, Jesus doesn’t just tell us that he’s the Messiah. Jesus reminds us that he identifies with those who are in need, particularly the ones that our society rejects and ignores. They’re the ones we’ll learn from.

If Jesus cares so much for those who have been marginalized and turned away, Jesus certainly cares for every one. Jesus isn’t comparing different kinds of people. There’s no us-versus-them in Jesus’ eyes. We all need someone to save us and care for us. We all need someone to believe in. The problem is that we find it difficult to help others because we don’t know how to admit that we’re needy, too.

“Let’s use our imagination for a moment and create a fictitious ‘neediness survey.’ For the following statements, rate how much you agree or disagree. Be honest!

- It’s okay to need another person’s help.
- All that I need I can provide.
- Don’t ask me for help. I’ll offer help when I can.
- I would come close to death before I would consider asking for help.
- It makes me uncomfortable to ask for help.

This isn’t a scientific survey. But it’s interesting, because this simple poll reveals a few possibilities for us to consider:

- We’re uncomfortable being vulnerable.
- We’re uncomfortable asking for help.
- We don’t have extra time to help.”³

³ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/season-after-epiphany-2019-part-1-worship-planning-series/january-27-third-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-c/third-sunday-after-the-epiphany-2019-year-c-preaching-notes>

Paul wrote, *“If one member suffers, all suffer together ... if one member is honored, all rejoice together”* (1 Corinthians 12:26, NRSV).

God’s favor is God’s blessing. When we try to hold onto God’s blessing, to hoard it or store it up for ourselves, it slips through our fingers. We lose what we had. When we pour God’s favor into others, blessing them with what we’ve been given by God – our lives, our money, our time and our spiritual gifts, that’s what God finds most pleasing, acceptable and welcome. That’s when we enter the season of greatest fruitfulness in our lives. That’s when we have the greatest joy.

If there’s one thing you take away from our time together this morning, I hope it’s this: Jesus loves those who love others.

Believe in him with all your heart and share the good news. You, your family and friends, our community and world will be glad.

Let us pray ...

God, you are a God of favor, of blessing. Your blessings are amazing. We thank you for the gift of life, for each day we have. We thank you for the gift of your love and the many ways love is part of our lives. We thank you for the gift of your Spirit, who gives us the inspiration, encouragement and prompting we need. Stir us from our complacency, Lord. Forgive us when we ignore the needs of others. Help us to find ways to share our lives with boldness and courage, knowing your abundant grace is moving in and through us. We pray this in the name of the one you anointed to save us, Jesus. Amen.

Luke 4:14-21 (CEB)

Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news about him spread throughout the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. On the Sabbath he went to the synagogue as he normally did and stood up to read. The synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the prisoners
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to liberate the oppressed,
and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.*

He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. He began to explain to them, *“Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it.”*