



Mission Impossible Theme Song... We're probably all familiar with that song, right? If this is your first time, please know that we don't start the sermon every Sunday with the theme from "Mission Impossible," but on some level, it *would* be appropriate to do so: The preacher, whether it's me or someone else, has the daunting task of helping us all not only to understand what God's word says, but what it means for us today, and encourage each of us to live by it – *and* keep you all awake in the process! I mean... Talk about Mission Impossible! 😂

But that theme song is appropriate today because of the passage we are looking at. You may recall that last week we ended with Luke telling us that Jesus returned to the region of Galilee “in the power of the spirit,” began teaching in synagogues, and people responded positively, praising him. So today picks up on that, and expands upon it, giving us more information and detail from a specific occurrence of his teaching. PRAY. So, we are in Luke 4, and we'll take the reading in pieces today, starting with **Luke 4:16-20**. This is God's words to you and me this morning.

So, **Jesus stands up in the synagogue of his own hometown, Nazareth, and reads a passage from the Jewish Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. He reads Isaiah: Isaiah 61:1-2.** We might wonder if this was a previously scheduled “reading of the day” or if Jesus sought this out. While there was a Scripture reading schedule developed – much like the lectionary readings today that some of us may be familiar with that goes in a three-year cycle – that schedule in their time doesn't seem to have been developed until after A.D.

70. Most likely, Jesus intentionally finds this passage in the Isaiah scroll that's handed to him, so as to read it and comment on it. And what we see in verses 18 and 19, which again aligns with Isaiah 61:1-2, is that: **A messenger of some kind, who is anointed by God, is going to do the things said here.** And it's centered around *proclaiming* several things: good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners and sight for the blind, setting free

of the oppressed, and the final proclamation is about the year of the Lord's favor.

There is some debate about when Isaiah 61:1-2 was originally written, with implications around whether or not Isaiah himself wrote this or someone later. Isaiah lived in the 700's B.C., when part of the nation of Israel was under Assyrian captivity. Later the whole nation came under Babylonian captivity. Most scholars believe the last several chapters of Isaiah were written after their return from that exile, which would place it in the last couple decades of the 6th Century, like around 515 BC or thereabouts.

If that's the case, then it was actually written by someone other than Isaiah, but in the tone and style of Isaiah...maybe even someone who was sort of a theological grandson of Isaiah, brought up not just in Judaism in a broad sense, but particularly in the footsteps and teaching of Isaiah. **Either way, it's an encouraging prophetic word calling God's people to proclaim God's goodness and restoration.**

And the Israelites themselves needed that word of encouragement as they returned from captivity, because it was a difficult season of rebuilding and re-establishing themselves as an independent nation. So, whether it was a prophetic word written by Isaiah sometime in the 700's B.C., or a prophetic word written later in the 500's, it is a prophetic word of hope and instruction for God's people, and when it was written kind of doesn't matter.

Initially, it was seen as a word to the whole nation as the anointed one referenced in the passage. Sort of a "corporate 'me'" when we read "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." In this understanding, all of Israel is called to what this passage says. God's Spirit is upon *all* of his people, and he's calling all of them, collectively as a nation, to live this out and collectively make these proclamations. It has also been seen as the prophet speaking about his *own* voice: that he is called to make these kinds of proclamations.

But Isaiah 61:1-2 was also was seen as a Messianic prophecy, about a future Messiah. The word "Messiah" is the Hebrew word for "anointed." So, to speak of the "Messiah" is to speak of one who is "anointed." And that's exactly what this passage says, that God has "anointed me" and then

“sent me” to make these proclamations. And all of this would be stuff that Jesus’ audience would be familiar with, just as those of us who have been Christians for a number of years are familiar with much of the Bible, particularly the New Testament, and many parts of the Old Testament as well...right? *We are* familiar, right? We should be, but whether *we* are or not: *they* were familiar with their Scriptures. So, this is almost certainly a fairly familiar passage, especially given its messianic teaching and their anticipation of the coming Messiah. These verses are like right in their wheelhouse for what was a significant religious theme for them at this time: that a Messiah, an anointed one from God, would be coming.

And so: **This anointed one is going to be sent to proclaim these things: good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners and sight for the blind, setting free of the oppressed, and the year of the Lord’s favor.** So, Jesus is the guest rabbi for the day here in his hometown synagogue. Everyone’s going to be there, not that they probably weren’t anyway because “going to church” was so engrained in their culture and in their lives...they wouldn’t think of missing; they didn’t need a “Kick-off Sunday” or “Back to Church Sunday”. But nonetheless, Jesus’ teaching probably got people a little more engaged than they might normally be. It’s exciting to see someone step into that kind of role. So, let’s see what Jesus has to say to them (**Luke 4:21**).

You know, if everyone in the room at that moment had been given bingo cards with the boxes filled with things Jesus might say that day, this would not have been on anyone’s card. “I didn’t see *that* coming” would probably have been the understatement of the day. It may be that Jesus said a little more than just this one sentence, but this point is what he drove home and people remembered. As a preacher, I’ll gladly take people remembering one thing from a sermon. Like, that’s a major win for people to remember and apply to their lives one thing! And: **Jesus says that everything in that Isaiah passage, from 500+ years ago, is fulfilled in him.** It’s carried out. It’s accomplished. This is his mission, to do the verses he just read, and it’s accomplished in him. We see the accomplishment of it in his life as recorded in the rest of the biographies about his life. These verses he reads are exactly what he did.

And this flows out of the passage before this, that we looked at last week, where Jesus is baptized, the Spirit descends upon him like a dove, and he is declared to be God's Son. That identity as the son of God the Father, and the anointing of the Spirit that strengthens him for what God the Father is calling him to do, leads him ultimately to live into this mission statement and to make this unexpected claim that today, in their hearing, it is fulfilled. Let's read the last three verses to see how the people respond (**Luke 4:22-24**)...

So, at first, there's some positive response. All spoke well of him and they were amazed at his gracious words. **But then immediately there's also this question of doubt: "wait a minute, isn't this Joseph's son?"** There's doubt and maybe jealousy, or questioning if Jesus is educated enough, and worthy of this teaching, and all that. And after he addresses the things he knows they're thinking about in regards to his authority to teach like this: he makes this proverbial statement about a prophet being without honor in his own hometown.

And what happens then, beyond where we read, is that he goes on to teach a little more with some other Old Testament references to address their doubts about him, and the result is that the people are furious with him and drive him out of town. Jesus poked the bear and had this provocative teaching that ticked off the people of Nazareth.

But what we see here is Jesus' mission statement. He has come to proclaim: good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners and sight for the blind, setting free of the oppressed, and the year of the Lord's favor.

Jesus doubles down on this later on when a couple people come to him on behalf of John the Baptist and ask him if he's the one to come or should they expect another. In other words: are you the Messiah or not? And in response Jesus gives an answer that's not a quote of the Isaiah passage he read in today's passage, but a very similar response nonetheless: **"Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor."** (**Luke 7:22**). It's very similar. So, this is Jesus' mission, and it's because of his identity as the Son of God.

So, what does this mean for us as disciples of Jesus on mission for him? If our primary identity is “disciple of Jesus” then what can we take away from this passage and apply to our lives? I think there are four related things.

First: Just as Jesus operated in the power of the Holy Spirit, we must do the same thing. We are often tempted to do ministry and Christian living in our own strength. Jesus’ dependence on the Spirit shows us the only way forward. Our “mission” is impossible unless God empowers it. This is elusive for most Christians, but when you’re operating in the power of the Spirit, you know it. Things “click.” God’s timing is evident. You have courage you can’t explain. It doesn’t mean everything is easy. Opposition will come – Jesus got put on the cross. But even that stuff God will use, by his Spirit, to bring glory to him. So we must operate in the power of the Spirit, working with God, not getting ahead of him, or lagging way behind.

Second: Having a relationship with God and being a part of what he’s doing is not “someday when I get my life together” because the mission is already “fulfilled” in Jesus. The Kingdom is here and now, as well as on the other side of the grave. It’s not perfect here, for sure. Sin still has a foothold in this world and in our lives. But the values of the Kingdom, the things that God is all about, are available here and now because of Jesus: Forgiveness, freedom, restoration and healing, reconciliation, joy, peace, and so forth. These things are available today, right now – and they’re offered to us even as we are poor, hungry, and held captive. We don’t escape those places of life and then receive Jesus. He meets us in them and leads us out of them and into the abundant life that he offers.

Third, when we look at the response of those in his hometown who were familiar with Jesus because he’d grown up there, we see that: **Third, familiarity with Jesus and the Christian faith can actually breed a lethargic response to him.** The people who had known Jesus the longest, the people from his own hometown, were the hardest ones for him to reach. You can grow up around the gospel, be in church every Sunday, and still not be on mission for Jesus. Familiarity can bring comfort and lethargy and prevent us from truly following Jesus and engaging in discipleship and evangelism and the mission he sends us on.

And then lastly: **Fourth, Jesus invites us on this same mission with him. In fact, this is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.** We find our identity in him as we talked about last week, and then his mission becomes our mission, because he's not just savior, but Lord of our lives. He gives us direction, and it is in alignment with his mission. So, we want others to know the riches, the satisfaction, the freedom, and the presence of God here, today, as well as on the other side of the grave. That's what Jesus was about, and so that's what we're about. We do it for God's glory and for the benefit of our neighbors.

The Good news of Jesus is so good that we want others to know him and come to faith in him. It's why we pray for our neighbors and seek to know them and serve them and be a blessing to them. Prayer and befriending and service is how we gain the opportunity to talk about our faith or invite them to church, and share the good news of Jesus and this mission that Jesus is all about. All of this might seem like an impossible mission that he sends us on; but Jesus has already done the hard work for us. And with him, as Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do all things through him (Christ) who strengthens me." I saw a coffee mug once that said, "I can do all things through a verse taken out of context." The context is, we can do what God is leading us to do. We can do all things that God calls and sends us to do. And he sends us on this mission that Jesus has. If you follow Jesus, he's calling you on this mission. And he makes this mission possible: to proclaim the good news of satisfaction, freedom, healing and the presence of God starting here today, through trusting Jesus. Let's pray...Amen.