Mission Revealed

Isaiah 42:1-9 Kimby Young

Luke 4:14-21 February 5, 2017

During the season of Epiphany, which is now till the end of the month, we focus on how Jesus Christ revealed to the world who God is. This passage from the gospel of Luke is often considered Jesus’ mission statement. This encounter in his hometown of Nazareth is the first recorded “sermon” of Jesus – his first public statement about what he believed God was calling him to do. And as followers of Jesus Christ, this is Jesus’ explanation of what we are called to do as well. Like Jesus’ first miracle and his baptism, this early word from Jesus tells us a great deal about who Jesus was, and therefore who God is. Jesus said that he came to Earth, he was anointed by God at his baptism, in order “to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Jesus says, this is what I will be doing, this is why I am here, this is how the world can see and experience God’s love. And in the stories that follow in the rest of the gospel, Jesus lives out these words in concrete acts of healing and grace.

The first and the last phrases in Jesus mission statement have very similar meanings and serve as parenthetical overarching goals. The first phrase – “to proclaim good news” and the last phrase “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” – are two sides of the same coin. The good news IS the year of the Lord’s favor. That is the good news Jesus was proclaiming – the gospel we are called to share. To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor meant that the Messiah had come, the reign of God on Earth had begun. When Jesus said – “today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,” Jesus was revealing that he was the Messiah. He was sharing that God’s plan for the world of peace and justice had begun. To spell out what that would look like Jesus quoted Isaiah as describing “good news for the poor, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and release for the oppressed.” That is what good news looks like. That is what Jesus came to offer. That is what we are called to do in the world – to share God’s good news that Jesus Christ has come and God’s kingdom has begun. We proclaim that good news as we work for the good of the poor, freedom for those who are bound and burdened, healing for all who are wounded, sight for those who cannot see or understand, comfort for those who mourn, and release for all who are restricted. The Message version of these verses says “to tell everyone about God’s love and favor.” That is our calling.

How will we do that? Our mission statement at First Presbyterian Church of Gardner says we are “the hands and feet of Jesus.” We are the “boots on the ground” so to speak. We are the ones who can do what needs to be done in the world, what God wants to happen in the world, right here and now. We are the ones who can live God’s love in concrete ways, just like Jesus did. We put God’s love into action.

What would that look like? How can we at First Presbyterian Church proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ? Recently, the session had a planning retreat in which we identified short term and long term overarching goals. Our number one goal is to GROW as a church – that is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in such a way that others will see and come to know God. We have not yet identified specific ways to accomplish this goal, but it seems Jesus has outlined a roadmap for us in this scripture. We share the gospel. We proclaim the good news by reaching out to the poor, the oppressed, the wounded and the weary. We share the good news that Jesus Christ lifts those burdens and offers release. We show God’s love, just as Jesus did.

All of this has been rather abstract so far. And it was for Jesus at this point in his ministry as well. He was announcing the big picture of his mission, what he would be doing. But in the very next story in the very same chapter of Luke Jesus begins healing. Person after person, story after story – Jesus takes on who ever crosses his path. Demon possessed, fever ridden, paralyzed, blind, lame, broken, barren, burdened. One after another – whoever comes his way. Jesus offers comfort and care. Jesus changes lives and brings relief. Jesus offers healing and strength. Jesus makes life new. And We are called to do the same. Jesus also forgives sinners and confronts the powerful who neglect their responsibility. Jesus points the way to transformation. And we are called to do the same. There’s an old phrase among preachers. We are called to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” The challenge is - knowing which is which. We sit right next to each other in the pew – the wounded and the well off. We walk right beside each other and may not be able to tell who needs to be challenged and who needs to be healed or forgiven or comforted. Our challenge is to deliver the good news to each person as they need to hear it. As we need to hear it. Our challenge is to understand who we are in the presence of God and rise to our true calling. You see, we all are broken, whether we know it or not. We all need to hear the good news and receive God’s merciful grace. Some are literally poor – lacking material resources to survive and thrive. Others of us are spiritually poor – lacking the wholeness God gives to all who trust in God alone. Some of us are literally in prison. Others of us are bound by invisible barriers that hold us back from our full potential. To all of us God offers freedom and release. Some of us are blind or in need of healing that is obvious. Others of us are blinded by ignorance or willfulness or insecurity or fear. We all need to have our eyes opened to God’s healing touch, to God’s gift of transformation and new life. Some of us are oppressed. Some of us are the oppressors, putting others down in weak attempts to lift ourselves up. Only by God’s grace are we all freed. Only when all of us rise do any of us succeed.

When Jesus came “to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,” Jesus was not only speaking to each of us, but about all of us. We are the poor, the prisoners, the blind, the powerless and the oppressed. But we are also those who have been transformed by the touch of Christ. We are also those empowered to transform the world – to bring healing and freedom and wholeness to the world. The Spirit of the Lord has been poured out on you by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God makes us able to do whatever we are called by God to do, even if we are unsure. God is confident. God believes in us.

Maybe the broken are right inside this room. Maybe they are just beyond the doors. Maybe they are around the world. Our mission is to transform lives with the grace of God in Jesus Christ. We have heard the good news of Jesus Christ. We have been given the power of God’s Spirit. We have received grace, and grace enough to share. We hear God’s call for us to step out in faith, to be all that God has created us to be. We know God loves us. We must show that love to others, everywhere we go, everything we do. We must proclaim that good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ our Lord to all the world.

So today, hear God’s Word and hear Christ’s challenge. Proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. Share that good news of love and justice, mercy and hope, healing and forgiveness to anyone who crosses your path – to everyone you can reach. By the grace of God, the power of the Spirit and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.