

Luke 4:14-21

Jesus is returning from his time in the wilderness. Directly following his baptism, the Spirit pushed Jesus into the wilderness to meet the Devil, where Jesus overcame all the earthly challenges placed before him and remained true to who he is, God's son. The angels came and nourished him and, full of the Holy Spirit, he returned to his hometown. If you remember last week's sermon about the wedding in Cana of Galilee, you're probably wondering why he isn't returning from turning water into wine, but the wedding story is told only in John, Luke's gospel doesn't refer to it. Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit as he has returned home, and just like he always did, he went to the Synagogue on the Sabbath. Today he is reading from the scrolls. He reads Isaiah 61 and sits down. That's the common way to preach in those days, seated with the other men on the floor. All we hear is that Jesus told them that today the scripture had been fulfilled in their hearing. That may have been a bit hard for them to swallow, hearing from a man they'd known all his life that he was the one bringing them good news. It's a shame they couldn't have accepted Jesus at his word, they would have been so blessed.

The people in the reading of the law from Nehemiah (when they heard the book of the law read to them) realized how far they had strayed from being true to who God wanted them to be, and they wept. But Nehemiah told them to be joyful, they had found the truth and they are to rejoice in God's truth as we should to.

Jesus brought the good news to the poor. In Luke 6:20 Jesus said to his disciples, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." I don't imagine Jesus' disciples had much money. They were never in one place long enough to hold down a job. We don't hear about them doing crafts and selling them in the marketplace. So, yes, they were poor. Yet their lives were rich. Can you imagine living in the presence of Jesus 24/7? They were wealthy in what is important to God. Jesus spread this wealth beyond the disciples, he told everyone he met about God, that God is love, and what God expects.

Jesus proclaimed release to the captives. Those who are held captive to sin find release through Jesus. This is still true today. We are held captive by our sin. Some, through the Holy Spirit, receive the call of Jesus to repent and are freed from whatever it is that has held them in bondage. Sin isn't a popular word these days, yet the Bible tells us in Romans that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God. Jesus is the only way that allows us to stand in front of God. Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus has taken the sin of the world upon himself, has become an intermediary, so that we can receive grace and forgiveness. Grace isn't free even though it's freely given. Jesus paid a price so that we may have grace. Can we expect to receive grace without having faith in Jesus?

Jesus said the sight of the blind will be recovered. There are many instances in the gospels where Jesus gave sight to the blind... Bartimaeus, the one who persisted even when the people tried to quiet him. Jesus heard him and gave him sight. The man who when Jesus first asked him if he could see said, yes, I can see people, but they look like trees, then Jesus laid hands on him again and the man could see clearly. And the young man who was born blind where the disciples asked, who sinned that this man was born blind, him or his parents? Jesus said no sin caused the blindness; it was only time for the glory of God to be revealed. In today's world the miracle of sight restored comes through the hands of the ophthalmologist who has been trained to heal eyes. We must realize that this ability may come through years of dedicated training, but the true gift comes from God for the training would not be there if God didn't provide for it.

Yet there is another kind of blindness that Jesus cures. That is spiritual blindness. Many of the leaders of the Jewish nation were blind to who Jesus is, they would not accept him as the son of God, the Messiah, come to save the people. Yet, there were some who accepted such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. There are people today, who though they aren't religious leaders, were brought

up in the church and when they left home left the church behind as well. They were blinded to who Jesus is. Samantha is one of those persons. She was brought up in church, but it made no sense to her. When she went to college, she started making friends with people who led her into drinking and drugs. She said she was drunk most nights, she did drugs a lot, and she saw no purpose in her life. When she graduated college her parents, who had no idea she was into drugs and alcohol and thought she was still going to church, bought her a Kindle for her graduation and loaded a Bible onto it. Samantha started reading the Bible, started reading online devotions, and started to think there might be something to it. When she and her boyfriend had a huge fight she gave it all to God, her entire life. She spent an hour in prayer confessing to God all that she had done, and asked God to do what he wanted with her life, not knowing if it would change anything. When she was finished praying all of a sudden Samantha said she felt as though a weight had been lifted from her life. She could see how her partying was just a waste of time and she wanted to go to church. She started understanding what she was reading in the Bible. The Holy Spirit had opened her eyes to Jesus. (cru.org)

The captives have been released. The blind have been given sight. The oppressed are set free. The Lord's favor has been proclaimed. And it is being proclaimed. It is the now and not yet tension that we live in in this time. Yes, there have been captives released, but there are still captives to be released. There are blind who have been given sight, but there are many who are still blind. The oppressed have been freed, but there are many who are still oppressed. The year of the Lord's favor has been proclaimed, and it is still being proclaimed. Christians around the world are being the hands and feet of Jesus releasing captives, giving spiritual sight, freeing the oppressed. Jesus said the poor will always be with us, he didn't say so, but I believe so will the captive and the oppressed always be with us. At least until grace overcomes greed.

But as long as Jesus is proclaimed there is hope.
All glory be to God.