

**“Jesus began to teach . . . .”**

23 January 2022: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany  
Salado UMC—Salado, Texas 76571  
Preaching Text: Luke 4:14-21

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**“When I am abroad, I always make it a rule never to criticize  
or attack the government of my own country.  
I make up for lost time when I come home”**

*(Sir Winston Churchill, 1874 - 1965).*

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Do you remember the first time you went back to your high school after graduation? Many people come back to see how the school and the people are doing without them, usually sometime after the first year they are “out in the world.” I remember the first time I went back to my high school after I had graduated. It was at Thanksgiving break my freshman year at SMU.

What surprised me was that no one seemed too surprised to see me. I had left and no one really noticed—or even noticed that I was back. Of course, I went to a large urban high school and had 800 pupils in my freshman class, although only 536 actually graduated. Large public high schools, I realize, are chiefly impersonal institutions. Yet, one might think that someone, anyone, would pay a bit of individual and special attention to a distinguished alumnus. Yet, the most individual special attention I received on my return was only that several of my former teachers merely, and ever so slightly, raised an eyebrow, and asked if I could come back later when they were not so busy—say, next summer. Coming home is not always the way we might have anticipated it. May we note, however, in Luke’s story of Jesus’ homecoming it was not Jesus who was in for a big surprise. It was everyone else!

The devil [or the Satan, *ha-satan*, or the adversary] tempted Jesus in the wilderness, as we remember from Luke’s Gospel story. The temptation was to misemploy Jesus’ divine power for personal benefit, for worldly command, and for protection from God’s ultimate plan fulfilled in the Messiah and the cross. Returning to Galilee, Jesus, as was his custom, attends synagogue services with his family. The synagogue leaders ask Jesus to read the scripture and to give the morning message. Perhaps this was the Jewish version of our United Methodist Student Day. Luke tells us who Jesus is as he describes the

story of the young thirty-year-old Jesus reading the text from the prophet Isaiah. Luke establishes Jesus as a continuation of God's promise to the people of Israel. As Luke writes, Jesus is a gifted teacher. Jesus also has identifiable authority in instructing people about God and God's plan. Luke emphasizes, in verses 18-19, that Jesus' mission is to the "poor," whether they are poor financially, spiritually, or physically. The phrase, "the year of the Lord's favor," refers to the Jewish Jubilee year. Once every fifty years Israel forgives all debts and frees all slaves. Jesus, in his sermon in the Nazareth synagogue, applies these verses to himself. He will carry out the undertaking of the people's expectation of Messiah, but certainly not in the way the people expected. After his stellar moment at the lectern, Jesus sits down to interpret or to teach from the scripture he reads. Jesus says that God's plan is now coming to fulfillment. Hear the lesson as Luke told it:

**[14] Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. [15] He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.**

**[16] When 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, [17] and 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,**

**[19] to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."**

**[20] And 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. [21] Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:14-21, see parallels: Matthew 13:53-54; Mark 6:1-2).**

1. What Jesus quotes from Isaiah’s prophecy is the content of the good news of the gospel. It explicitly reveals God’s promise to God’s people. It is what God wants for God’s people. Jesus reads the promise from Isaiah:

“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,**

**[19] to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

According to Luke, this is the gospel’s good news—a promise from God, through Jesus as the Christ, to God’s people.

2. Just having the promise, however, is not enough. People have lived under the promises of God for centuries and yet many people still live in misery, poverty, blindness, and in spiritual sickness. One needs not only to possess the gospel’s proclamation of good news. There is more to the promise of God than that.

One day Benjamin Franklin was giving a speech about the significance of the Constitution of the United States. As the story goes, a man in the crowd rudely pushed his way to the front and interrupted Franklin by shouting, “The Constitution means nothing to us. It states that we are guaranteed happiness

. . . where is all the happiness it insures?” Franklin smiled and said, “My friend, the Constitution only guarantees you the right to *pursue* happiness. You have to *catch* it yourself.”

**3.** How does one possess the promise is a good question. For those who heard Jesus, the answer was that Jesus himself embodied the promises of God. To those who knew him as a child, that prospect seemed dim indeed. Perhaps, in some ways the intervening centuries have given us a better perspective about who Jesus is and why he has come. This much I know: To live the promise of God is to possess the promise of God. It is just both this simple and this difficult.

I once read a story about a foot bridge which spans the Welland River just before it empties into the Niagara River and heads toward the great falls. At the point of the footbridge, the river is becomes calm and navigable. But danger lurks. So, there is a sign affixed to the posts of the bridge intended for boaters to read and heed. It asks only two questions:

- 1) Do you have an anchor?
- 2) Do you know how to use it?

I know no two better questions to ask yourself today. Do you have an anchor in your life? Do you know how to use it? (Brian Bauknight, unpublished sermon: 13 September 1992). People today want to make the promise of God relevant to life. Perhaps, we would do well to make our lives relevant to the promise of God. Amen.

David Neil Mosser, SUMC, Salado, Texas, 76571