Setting the Captives Free: Living the Mission
Luke 4: 14 – 21
A sermon by Rev. Dr. David Clark
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Jesus' Inaugural Sermon: a sermon on Luke 4: 14 – 21

Jesus' habit of going to worship.

I want to congratulate you for being here today because you are doing a very Jesus-like thing. A verse in our scripture passage from Luke 4:14-21 says "As was his custom, Jesus went to the synagogue." He made it his habit, to attend worship. I imagine he could have said, "You know, when I go, I don't really learn anything I didn't already know. I mean it's not like some rabbi is going to reveal something about the nature of God I didn't already know because I *am* the nature of God."

He didn't do that. Jesus knew worship isn't just about what one "gets out of it." It's about what you put into it, praising God--cultivating a sense of awe and wonder, reconnecting with the history of God's faithfulness through the ages, hearing the promises of what lies ahead. We connect with the divine in prayer and support each other on the journey. To be a Jesus follower is to do the things he did. What did he do? He made it his custom to attend public worship.

If it's not already your custom, make it your custom, your habit to regularly immerse yourself in the splendor of God and the fellowship of community. It's a reasonable TikTok substitute.

Jesus' inaugural address

While at worship, Jesus unrolls the scroll and reads from the prophet Isaiah. And now he's going to preach his first sermon--his inaugural sermon. Like a presidential inaugural address, Jesus sets the tone and his agenda, what he's really about. He gives us his ideas of his job description as Messiah:

> *"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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Can I get a witness?

I wonder if there's anyone here today who can testify to the life-changing, soul-saving, heart-healing power of Jesus! Can I get a witness. Shout out an "Amen" if

any of these apply to you.

- Is there anybody was so poor you "didn't have a pot to pee in?" But the good news found you and declared that your worth is not measured by your bank account or degrees on the wall or position in society but by the love of God Almighty!
- Is there anyone here who has felt the chains fall off? Chains of addiction, of fear, of self-doubt, or the toxic grip of someone who tried to hold you back? Is there anyone here who has tasted freedom and can declare, "I am free?"
- Is there anybody who has had some spiritual blindness lifted, you see things more clearly now than you did before? Truths previously hidden you now realize and make your life better now that you know.
- Is there anyone here who has felt the weight of oppression lifted—whether it was a system, a circumstance, someone else's expectations, or even your own thoughts pressing down on you—and can now stand tall and say, "I am no longer bound!"?
- Is there anyone here who has found a peace so deep, so steady, that it holds you through the storm? A peace that comes from knowing you are under the shelter of God's unwavering favor and care? Is there anyone here who knows that peace?

Can I get a witness today that Jesus is still on the job, mending broken hearts, pointing us toward justice, giving us strength when we are weak, and calling us to be examples of his unstoppable, unshakable, unending loving kindness?

If Jesus has made your life better, shout, "Amen!" If you know his power is real, shout, "Hallelujah!" If you're ready to be a witness to his goodness, say, "Here I am, Lord!"

What's in Jesus' agenda?

It's about making people's lives better. It's not about retribution or persecuting perceived enemies. It's not about forcing his will on people. It's not about casting blame. It's not about demonizing people who are poor or struggling. It's not about making sure the extremely wealthy become obscenely wealthy. It's not about seizing territory. It's not about promoting greed and selfishness, a me-and ours-first ideology. It's not about forcing his religion on others. It's about tangibly making people's lives better in this world.

As followers of Jesus, our job description is the same as Jesus' job description, to be about doing the right thing, standing up for justice and those on the margins. But for too much of Christian history, this agenda has been subverted. Often faith has been reduced to a private faith about personal salvation, focused on what we believe while ignoring the suffering of the world.

Now. Now. Now.

Jesus' sermon was short. "Today it is fulfilled in your hearing of it." For hundreds of years, people had been going to worship, hearing this promise in Isaiah. It gave them hope that the way things are will not always be that way. They had suffered under brutal tyrants, crushing poverty, oppressive governments. They sent anybody who disrupted the system to prison or killed them. Insensitivity to people's physical ailments ruled the day and they were ostrasized. The poor got poorer while the rich got richer.

I need to teach something about the Bible here. When Isaiah talked about the year of the Lord's favor, he was referring to the Old Testament command of Jubilee where everybody's debts were canceled, erased, forgotten and generational poverty wouldn't be "a thing" anymore.

Jesus said it starts now with me. It's no longer hope deferred but this is what we are working for.

But the congregation said back to Jesus. "Now, now, now. Wait a minute. You don't have the credentials to pull that off. You're just the carpenter's kid from the backwoods of Nazareth." They knew talk about changing the status quo would stir up trouble. But it the words of Civil Rights leader and former Congressman John Lewis. Jesus was up to the task of stirring up "Good Trouble."

Fear always tries to stop progress and doing the right thing. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote the famous Letter from the Birmingham jail in response to people telling him to slow down and quit pressing so hard for change. He said no we've waited too long already. Now is the moment.

And so it is that now is our moment to keep pressing for justice and fairness and a change in the system to benefit instead of exploiting people.

What shall we do?

It's not hard to figure out. Our job description as followers of Jesus has been clearly laid out: to seize every opportunity to help people, to stand up for justice, to be a light of loving-kindness in a world grown too accustomed to darkness.

On this Martin Luther King Jr. Sunday, we remember Dr. King's vision didn't stop with civil rights. He launched the Poor People's Campaign. Today, Rev. William Barber has reignited that campaign, calling for nothing less than a moral revival in America—a return to the core of what it means to live as people of faith where we

deal with the intertwining of poverty, racism, militarism, and environmental degregation.

And we, the people of God, are called to answer that revival. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us—yes, upon *you*—to carry on this holy work. To bring good news to the poor. To proclaim liberty to the captives. To bind up the brokenhearted and restore hope to those who have lost it.

This is not the work of someone else. It is our work. It is our job description, handed down by Jesus himself, lived out by those who came before us, and entrusted to us for this moment.

So let us rise to the task. Let us build a world where no child goes to bed hungry, where no family is left homeless, where no one suffers the indignity of oppression. Let us dream with boldness, act with courage, and love without limits.

Because the Spirit of the Lord is upon us! To do all the good we can. By all the means we can. In every place we can. At every time we can. Amen.

Meta Description
Experience a powerful "Jesus' Inaugural Sermon" based on Luke 4: 14 – 21 . Discover how Jesus' first miracle reveals God's abundant grace and the promise that the best is yet to come.

Tags
Sermon on Luke 4: 14-21, Jesus Inaugural Sermon, Jesus' first sermon, Abundance mindset, Christian reflection, God's blessings