Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

Candidates for the U.S. presidency often begin their campaigns by returning to their hometowns to show their roots and values as the springboard of their desire to serve the country. Jesus also returns to Nazareth at the start of his ministry to define his purpose and call as a preacher. He already has a reputation in nearby Capernaum as a miracle worker, and his family and neighbors turn out to welcome him and to find out what has turned this small town carpenter into such a phenomenon.

Jesus goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath and is invited to do the reading from the Book of Isaiah. He unrolls the scroll until he finds the passage describing the call of a leader who says that God’s spirit is on him and that he had been anointed to announce good news to the poor. The passage Jesus reads is found in Chapter 61 of Isaiah, and it describes the fulfillment of the Covenant Code given by Moses as Israel entered the Promised Land after the long desert sojourn following the exodus from slavery in Egypt.

God’s favor in liberating his people was to be matched by their commitmet to foster a society in which the poor would be favored, people would no longer be blind, captives would be set free and all oppression would end. A year of favor called a jubilee would restore the land and cancel all debts. Jesus said that this special time was at hand. This was his inaugural address, and the text from Isaiah was his platform.

While some view Jesus as a revolutionary, Luke shows him reaching back into the tradition of the Law and the Prophets for his mission. Like all the prophets, he was not projecting some new vision into the future, but recalling the foundations of God's covenant with his chosen people from the creation and the great narratives of the past. Fidelity to the covenant was the source of renewal.

The rest of today's Gospel reading describes the reception Jesus and his message received. Nazareth wanted miracles, and when Jesus chided them with a familiar saying about prophets being accepted everywhere except at home, the incensed crowd ran him out of town. Luke sets in motion the theme of rejection that will mark the rest of his Gospel. Jesus is not going to be the Messiah people want, but he will fulfill Isaiah's songs of the Suffering Servant, the Messiah God sent.

Jesus' disciples share his anointing to bring good news to the poor. The Spirit that moved him is the Spirit that made the church on Pentecost and entered each of us at baptism. Each time we read the Scripture that Jesus chose to define his life, we should pray that it will come true in our hearing.

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