



3rd Sunday after Epiphany
January 27, 2019
Luke 4:14-21

"Good News for the Poor!"

To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins with His own blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and father, to Him be glory forever and ever, Amen. In the name of Jesus, dear friends in Christ,

When you turn on the TV, when you open the newspaper, when you click on your favorite news website, what do you expect to see? What are you looking to find out? Perhaps we'll see some good news, our team won the game that we didn't get to watch, someone did a good deed, a tragedy was subverted by heroic actions, the weather is looking good for a number of days, perhaps we expect to see some good news, but, on the whole, what do we typically find out in the news? Don't we often see bad news? The stock market is down, the government is shut down, fights, you name it. Life is full of bad news. The world is full of bad news, our lives are full of bad news. That's the reality, that's the condition, that's the situation and circumstance that will be true until the day that we die. But in a world dark with bad news there came one whose whole life was to bring good news—good news that changes how we deal with the bad news.

Jesus came to his own hometown of Nazareth. The place where he had grown up, the place where presumably he had buried his foster father Joseph, where he'd worked as a carpenter to support his mother. The news about him and his teaching had permeated the area so that people praised him. And on one Sabbath day Jesus went to the synagogue — **as was his custom**. Interesting words, right? It was Jesus' habit to go to church, to hear the Word. Now there's some people who say, "I don't need to go to church, I know everything already." Here, who is going to church? The Son of God, Himself!! It if it was important for the Son of God to go to church — what about you and me?

Well, Jesus goes to the synagogue and interestingly their worship was actually somewhat similar to the way that we still worship today— there was a reading from Scripture and then someone would give an explanation and application of that Scripture. The scroll of the Prophet Isaiah was given to Jesus and He read, **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."** Then he rolled the scroll up, gave it back to the attendant, sat down and began by saying, **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."**

Now, the only way that you can know that something is "good" news is if you've known "bad" news, right? I mean, if all you ever heard was good news, there would be nothing to differentiate it and really appreciate good news over bad. You don't really appreciate something that is sweet until you've tasted something that is sour. Jesus is speaking a message here that applies to people who are poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed. To really appreciate this message, you need to understand that he's talking to you. Jesus was talking to a bunch of people who freely walked to that synagogue that day, most of whom could probably see Jesus with their eyes, most of whom probably were not living destitute lives. On the outside everything might have looked fine, but on the inside it's a mess. But Jesus is also talking to you and me here. Now you might be thinking to yourself, "That's not me. I'm not poor, I'm not a prisoner, I'm not blind, I'm not oppressed."

But if you do, you need to take an honest look at your life. It is only when you realize that you are poor, spiritually poor and powerless on your own to do anything good in your life that you will have what Jesus gives here. You see, freedom is not being free to do whatever I want to do. True freedom is really being set free to be exactly who God made me to be.

Many people think that the church is all about rules and laws, meant only to hold people back, to limit them from their true potential, to cause them to miss out on the fun of this world and the pleasures that this world has to offer them. People think that living the Christian life is boring, you can't do whatever you want to do, live the way you want to live, do the things you want to do. There are these commandments that you have to follow, there are these "rules" that you have to follow. But what's behind that? What's behind this thinking that God's rules and commandments are "enslaving and burdensome." It's really a denial of the goodness, grace, and goodwill of God. They paint in their mind's eye this picture of God as a cruel Master who's trying to keep his subjects in line with laws and rules. The last thing that He wants is to see someone having any kind of fun.

That's what people think about God. But that's all a lie of Satan. That's Satan's old deception right to the time of Adam and Eve. "Did God REALLY say that??" "REALLY?" Was God that dumb, that mean, that cruel to say that you couldn't eat from ANY tree in the garden?? The only way you can experience true freedom, the only way that you can see clearly, the only way that you can enjoy release, the only way you can be rich, eat the fruit!! Sin! Indulge your flesh! Lust, covet, cheat, disrespect, indulge yourself!

People think that! You and I sometimes think that! But what irony! We think that the path to freedom, fun, release, sight, riches, is through sinning. But it's really the opposite. Sin enslaves. Sin makes you a prisoner. Sin robs you of life. Sin blinds. First, sin makes you poor. It empties you. When all you're concerned about is yourself, you have nothing to give, you're empty, you're poor, you can't build others up because you've got nothing, you can have all kinds of wealth, riches, power, but be incredibly poor, sin makes you poor. Second, sin makes you a prisoner. It's not the picture here of someone sitting in jail, but of someone being dragged off as a captive conquered by the enemy. Sin is such a harsh task master. It beats you up, hurts you, forces you to do things you wouldn't normally do. Sin doesn't bring freedom, sin brings slavery! Sin also blinds. Sin blinds us not only to our sin, but to our own blindness. We can't even see just how blind we are. We justify our sinful behavior. We're pros at this. We justify our own sinful behavior: It's his fault, it's her fault, she made me do it, I wouldn't have done it if this didn't happen, if it was a different situation I never would have done it, what I did wasn't that bad – other people have done much worse things than me, if people only understood the situation, if people only understood what stress I've been in. Those who are caught in sin can't even see themselves. Sin blinds. And finally, sin oppresses. This last picture is that of a man sitting in prison, where he has been beaten by the jailer and is bleeding from his wounds. It comes from the word to "break into pieces." That's what sin does to the sinner. It destroys the body little by little, pain, suffering. Guilt, shame, anger, frustrations and fear weigh heavy. Escapes from this prison of sin are all futile. We tire ourselves out by working all the time, being busy, pouring ourselves into a hobby, trying to ignore it, but it's tiring, wearisome, draining, oppressive.

Those who are in the prison house of sin need someone to set them free. Many people in that synagogue looked fine on the outside, people today look fine on the outside, you and I sometimes look fine on the outside, but on the inside we're poor, blind, oppressed, prisoners of sin. And when we realize the bad news, we're ready for some good news.

What does Jesus say? This is exactly why I've come. I've come to bring good news!! I've come to make the poor rich. Freedom-true freedom from the pain and enslaving power of sin. Freedom for prisoners. Recovery of sight for the blind. The people walking in darkness have seen a light. A light to know what life is all about, eye-sight to see who you really are- a precious soul redeemed by the blood of Jesus, a child of God the eternal Father, eye-sight to see purpose and meaning life – you're here to praise and glorify God, to know Him better and make Him known in your world. Release from oppression- a life free from guilt, no more accusations, your slate of sin has been wiped clean, the devil cannot accuse you anymore because your sins- all of them- are forgiven. The year of the Lord's favor – this is referring to the year of jubilee when in the OT slaves were set free, debts were all forgiven, property was returned to the original owner, there was joy and gladness throughout the land. Because of Jesus and His work – you're free!

Why so? Jesus became poor – the poorest on earth- so that you might be rich eternally. Jesus became a prisoner, so that you might be forever free –truly free. Jesus blinded his eyes in death, so that you might see God. Jesus was oppressed so that you might be released from sin and all its consequences forever. And when does this happen? **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."** Jesus came, Jesus did His work and the effects of his work are ever present. Today! Not someday, not someday over the rainbow, not that nebulous time in our minds when everything is going to work out and all will be happy. Not someday when we'll be through all our problems and can finally enjoy life. Today! Today in the midst of all the junk of life, in the middle of everything that's happening, today God is working. Today, Jesus says you have freedom, today you are released from guilt and shame, today your sins are forgiven, today God looks on you with favor and gives you His peace. Today through all the detours and unplanned events of your life God has given you freedom and release, sight and riches.

Amidst all the good news and bad news of this world, amidst all the good news and bad news of your life, Today Jesus has come! Today Jesus has forgiven all your sins! Today He's released you! Appreciate this good news of Jesus today and always. Amen.