

Sermon for January 27, 2019
"Knowing God: Jesus"

Luke 4:14-21

For the past three weeks we have been talking about how God is revealed to us. We have talked about epiphany and how God was revealed to the wise men. We have talked about how God is revealed to us in baptism as we are all called to live as children of our Heavenly Father. We have talked about how God is revealed through the Spirit and the new life that we experience.

But Jesus himself is a revelation of God. Jesus is God come in the flesh; the incarnation. His life is a living example of who God is and how God wants us to live. You want to know what true righteousness looks like? Then look at how Jesus lived.

In the passage we read this morning Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry, outlined what his calling was; what his ministry would be. He already had a reputation as a healer and had followers, so people in his hometown wanted to see what he was all about. He read from Isaiah the passage that says, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me and has commissioned me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the oppressed, vision for the blind, liberation for the captives, and to proclaim that God's time has come." Then he said, "Today all that this Scripture says has happened before your very eyes!"

Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophets! In Jesus, God's will for good news to the poor, liberation for the captives and oppressed, and sight for the blind were already being fulfilled. Jesus was the living embodiment of those promises from God. The question is how did Jesus fulfill these? What does that tell us about God? And what does that mean for us as people of faith?

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's will that the poor receive good news. Certainly Jesus called on his followers to care for those in need. He himself fed the multitudes. God even identified Jesus with the poor by sending him as a poor homeless boy born in a stable. Jesus said that our actions in this life are judged by whether we have fed the hungry and clothed the naked; how we have responded to the "least of these." And Jesus' followers have done much to carry out that calling to bring good news to the poor. Just look at the ministries that try to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and education to those in need. Sure, there is still plenty of poverty, but the church has at least tried to address these needs.

But there is more in this word "poor" than just those who don't have much. Jesus is reading from Isaiah. In the Old Testament prophets "the poor" were a metaphor, a symbol, for those who put their whole trust in God. The poor can't trust in money or power to help them. They can only trust in God. Like the widow who put her last two cents in the collection, the poor trust completely in God.

God calls us to participate in liberating those who trust in God. That includes opposing oppressive social structures. It includes combating predatory lending and government run numbers games. But it goes beyond that. What about those who are at the end of their rope emotionally or spiritually. Those who have lost family and community and friends; or lost direction and purpose.

Jesus brought all this good news. He said "Blessed are you poor." (Luke 6:20) He proclaimed that God was responding to the needs of the world. We are part of that Good News. The church's response to the depth and breadth of human need is Good News to the poor!

Jesus is also the fulfillment of the promise to “proclaim release to the captives.” I think this is basically the same as “to let the oppressed go free.” When we hear words like “oppressed” and “captive” we usually think of people in political situations being denied their freedom. One might say “Well, what did Jesus do about the political oppression of his day?” He stood up to the religiously elite who were oppressing the people. He even died at the hands of the Romans who were oppressing people all over the world.

But more importantly he started a movement that has from time to time proclaimed release to the captives. In the early church Christians campaigned against the Greek practice of “exposing” children. If a family had a child they did not want or that was disabled they would abandon the child in the wilderness. Christians became famous for taking in these children and raising them. More recently Christians have fought against slavery, against child labor, for women’s rights, for civil rights and the list goes on. Admittedly Christians from time to time have been the oppressors too, but we can choose to follow the example of our Lord and stand up to the oppression of the world.

There is a whole other side of this. Governments and social structures are not the only things that oppress people. People are also oppressed and held captive spiritually. Jesus proclaimed the truth and said the truth shall make you free. He taught forgiveness and acceptance and life from God. We too need to proclaim release to the captives as he did.

Jesus is also the fulfillment of the promise of “recovery of sight to the blind.” Jesus certainly seemed to fulfill this promise. One of the things he was most famous for was giving sight to the blind. He could even give sight to those who were born blind. The religious leaders could not deny it.

But there is another dimension to this promise. Jesus gave physical sight to the blind but he also gave spiritual sight. Through his example and death and resurrection he enabled us to see God. Jesus humbled himself to wash his disciples’ feet to show us that God loves us and to give us an example of love for each other. He selflessly gave his life for us out of that same love. And his resurrection bears witness not just to eternal life after death but to the eternal nature of life in the here and now.

God in Jesus has opened our eyes. We are called to continue that ministry. The church should seek to bring physical healing to those who need it through support of hospitals and research and medical missionaries. The Imagine No Malaria campaign is just one example of that. At the same time, we need to live into the example of Jesus’ selfless love for all. We need to become the embodiment of God’s love and grace to open people’s eyes to God’s love for them.

In Jesus the poor hear good news, captives are liberated, the blind see. But what about the last promise: “to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” Has that been fulfilled in Jesus?

Well, has the time come for God’s favor or grace to be poured out? Is this the right time for people to be liberated and enlightened? Is today the day for people to hear good news?

I think it is! Jesus came to preach good news, to proclaim liberation, to give sight. You call yourselves Christians. Now is the time for us to follow Jesus’ example and act like his followers.