

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

JANUARY 2 - 6, 2023

Book of Luke • Jesus' Invitation to Hospitality

WELCOME TO THE TABLE

Epiphany Series
January 8 - February 19

MONDAY

Read **Luke 4:14-19**

Luke 4 recounts the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, focused on Nazareth where He was brought up. The first two verses of today's reading note that after His temptation in the wilderness by the devil, He "*returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and the news about Him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised Him*" (vv. 14-15). So the teaching He shared in Nazareth was not His first teaching, but it is the first recorded for us by the gospel writers.

There are several noteworthy points in the first four verses of Luke's account. First, Jesus was ministering "*in the power of the Spirit.*" Sometimes Christians mistakenly think that Jesus acted in the power of His divine nature. After all, He was the Son of God. But Luke affirms that Jesus' ministry was Spirit-empowered. Why is that important? If Jesus merely acted out of His divine nature, there is little hope for we mere mortals to do as He did. But if He ministered in the power of the Spirit—the same Spirit He has given to us—then we also can minister as He did.

Second, Jesus' ministry was widely acclaimed. News about Him spread like wildfire. Everyone had only good things to say about His teaching. In short, Jesus enjoyed celebrity status throughout Galilee. Nazareth was only one village in the region of Galilee, which encompasses the

Sea of Galilee. From Nazareth to Capernaum on the north end of the Sea of Galilee is about a 40-mile hike. So Jesus had likely taught in many synagogues before speaking at the one in His hometown.

Third, we are told that it was Jesus' custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath (Saturday). The synagogue was a place of prayer, learning, and meeting together (the word means "a place of assembly"). Jesus made a habit of attending the synagogue and, given His popularity, was probably often called upon to teach.

Finally, we learn that Jesus knew His way through the Hebrew Scriptures, finding a particular passage from the scroll of Isaiah for the text of His teaching. As we shall see, He chose this text in order to bring a specific message to His townspeople.

QUESTIONS

Given these observations about Jesus' ministry, consider what it means to follow Jesus' example. How can we do as He did?

PRAYERS

For Pars Theological Centre

Pray for Iranian Christians and seekers. Since September, Iran has been in great upheaval. Iranian protestors are demanding freedom from the repressive, brutal control of their rigid, theocratic government. Many of the younger generation who are spearheading the protests are also searching for an alternative to Islam. Pars continues to prepare the underground Christian church.

TUESDAY

Read **Isaiah 61:1-3; Isaiah 58:6-9a; Luke 4:14-19**

Jesus' selected text for His teaching was Isaiah 61:1-2. Since Luke wrote his Gospel in Greek and the original prophecy would have been written in Hebrew, some translation of words and concepts has already taken place.

For instance, when Jesus read, "*The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor*" (Luke 4:18a), the original prophet referred twice to Yahweh (LORD), the covenant name by which God had revealed Himself to Moses and Israel. We should also not overlook the power of the word "anointed," the verb from which the titles Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek) derive. In other words, this text is loaded with Messianic overtones which Jesus' audience would have certainly understood.

This Messianic context is further highlighted by the tasks given to this Anointed One. The primary task is proclaiming good news to the *poor*, a word that can also mean "suffering, patient, or pious." In Luke's Gospel, this proclamation of good news serves as a summary of Jesus' whole ministry. It is worth noting that this good news is directed to a specific group, the poor, who, due to their circumstances and place in society, have received more bad news than good news.

In addition to this primary task, Jesus continues to note the mission of the Anointed One: “He has sent me to *proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor*” (Luke 4:18b). Like the poor, the recipients of this mission were those who had experienced more of life’s difficulties than life’s pleasures: prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed. The Anointed One came to bring such people release from prison, sight, and freedom from oppression.

The final task for this Anointed One was “to *proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.*” This statement is typically understood as a reference to the Levitical Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25), a year in which all property was to be returned to its original owners and indentured servants were set free. The Jubilee Year especially benefitted those who had fallen upon hard times as it was a year of release and restoration.

QUESTIONS

Imagine this “good news” from two perspectives: that of a poor person and that of a wealthy person. How good is it for each? How do you see Jesus’ good news for the poor?

PRAYERS

For Pars Theological Centre

Pray for Iran and the protests. Pray for the women, men, and even children, who are speaking up against the government. Pray for change.

WEDNESDAY

Read **Luke 4:18-22**

After reading from the scroll of Isaiah, Jesus gave it back to the attendant and sat down. Luke tells us, “*The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him*” (v. 20). After reading such a text that was loaded with messianic overtones, they were eager to hear what He had to say. Jesus’ first words greatly pleased them when He said, “*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*” (v. 21).

By such an opening statement, Jesus declared that God’s promised good news had come to Nazareth. This good news was an expression of God’s hospitality: God is for you, God cares for the poverty, powerlessness, and oppression you are suffering. Whether this was at the hands of Rome or at the hands of the wealthy Israelites does not really matter. God had heard their cries and was offering His hospitality—His warm welcome and acceptance—to the people of Nazareth.

Implied in Jesus’ announcement of the fulfillment of this prophecy was His own identification as the Anointed One of God. But His hearers—the people with whom He grew up—seemed not to connect the dots. Instead, they expressed happy amazement that such gracious words could come from one of their own. “*Isn’t this Joseph’s son? they asked*” (v. 22).

Implied in such a question was an expectation that Jesus had far surpassed community expectations. It would appear they had bought into the same sentiment that Jesus' follower, Nathanael, expressed when he first heard about Jesus: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46). Whatever their exact expectations of this carpenter's son, Jesus seemed to have exceeded them.

As we contemplate Jesus' gracious words in this text, what is our reaction? Do we recognize the generous hospitality He proclaims to those who so desperately need it? Do we recognize Him not only as "the carpenter's son" but as the Anointed One, God's special emissary to bring good news, release, and freedom?

QUESTIONS

Do we identify Jesus' mission as our mission? What will it look like for us, the people of Glenkirk Church, to claim Jesus' mission of hospitality and good news as our own? What good news are we proclaiming to those in our community?

PRAYERS

For Pars Theological Centre

Pray for Pars' students, Sara and her husband, Homayoun. They are currently serving their sentence. Pray for their health and safety. Pray that Homayoun will have the assistance and medication needed for his Parkinson's disease.

THURSDAY

Read **Luke 4:23-27**

The Nazarenes' admiration of Jesus was short-lived. Jesus' next words challenged them to consider whether they really believed Him capable of doing here in His hometown the same amazing miracles He had done in other villages of Galilee. Jesus anticipated their expectations of Him, but He then challenged them to think of His mission and ministry in a very different way.

When Jesus stated, *"Truly I tell you, ... no prophet is accepted in his hometown"* (v. 24), He identified Himself as a prophet, one who speaks on God's behalf. The Nazarenes were expecting Him to do great things but were not prepared for the message He was about to bring. Citing examples from both Elijah and Elisha—two of Israel's greatest prophets—He made the point that God had chosen to provide for and heal those outside of Israel. In fact, Jesus implied that God had chosen to bless these foreigners over blessing His own people. This is a radical twist on the message of Isaiah about the mission of the Anointed One.

Jesus' contemporaries generally thought of the Messiah as One who came to deliver the people of Israel. After all, He was anointed by Yahweh, the God of Israel; it only made sense that the people of Israel would be His priority. But Jesus declared such an assumption was unfounded, that God cared as much about showing hospitality (welcome and acceptance) to those whom most Israelites considered

unclean and unworthy of God's favor. The year of God's favor was specifically directed to the people of Israel. But Jesus has just said God's favor now was meant to be experienced by everyone.

While the emphasis of Jesus' teaching was on the favor that God was about to bestow on Israel and the Gentiles, we should not overlook the common behavior exhibited by both of the recipients of God's favor in the stories of Elijah and Elisha. The widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian both responded to the prophet's word—which was actually God's word to them—in obedience. Both of them did what the prophet instructed them to do. In using such examples, Jesus was highlighting the proper response to God's word: obedience.

QUESTIONS

Do we sometimes think certain people are unworthy of God's favor? Do we extend hospitality just as warmly to those like us as to those who are not like us? What does obedience look like for us?

PRAYERS

For Pars Theological Centre

Pray that Iranians would discover their hope and comfort in Jesus and know that without him no change would be complete. Pray for Pars' students as they minister in this context. Pray that the Holy Spirit would guide them in serving with Christ's hands and feet and would give them discernment to know whom to minister to each day.

FRIDAY

Read **Luke 4:23-29**

The final response of Jesus' audience was murderous anger. They were ready to and attempted to kill Him. How dare this carpenter's son, one who had grown up in their midst, suggest that they were no more deserving of God's favor than foreigners who had never worshipped their God? Perhaps a few Samaritans came to mind or a Roman government official. Certainly, those people should not expect to share in God's generous hospitality, not after the things they had done.

Luke tells us that in the Nazarenes' fury at Jesus' words, they got up, drove Jesus out of the town, took Him to the top of a cliff, and attempted to throw Him off. Jesus—this celebrity teacher, the One whose parents they knew and who had read from the scroll of Isaiah so eloquently—had described God's purpose in a way they perceived as heretical. Such a person had no place in Nazareth, so they literally cast Him out of the town. In fact, they deemed Him as deserving of death for daring to suggest that God loved the Gentiles as much as—if not more than—He loved them. Although initially they spoke well of Him and marveled that the carpenter's son spoke so graciously, after hearing all of His teaching, they could find no good reason to show Him the hospitality of which He spoke.

Luke's account of how Jesus got away from this murderous crowd is very terse. He simply states, *"But He walked right through the crowd*

and went on His way” (v. 30). Our curiosity drives us to want more details. Did some of the crowd think better of their actions and *allow* Him to escape? Did Jesus’ authority overwhelm them? We do not know because the text does not tell us.

But the text does tell us the outcome of this scene: Jesus went on His way. The point Luke seems to make is simply that Jesus’ ministry had just begun. He did not need for His hometown folks to accept Him or His mission. God had sent Him to minister to others and He was prepared simply to move along.

QUESTIONS

How do we respond to others when we feel threatened? Do we recognize such situations as divine opportunities to see God work in marvelous ways? Are we mission-focused as Jesus was? How shall we practice hospitality?

PRAYERS

For Pars Theological Centre

Please pray for Pars’ faculty members, mentors, tutors, and staff as they minister to and provide counseling to the students. Pray that God will give Pars the words, wisdom, and insight to encourage its students.



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