

Jesus Brings Good News

Luke 4:14–21

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Before we turn to God's Word this morning, let me share briefly about our Diocesan Synod, which has taken place this weekend. Synod is the annual meeting of our diocese, and this year's gathering has been a very positive and encouraging one. It was Archbishop Brad's first Synod with us, and also my first Synod in the Diocese of Adelaide. One of the important focuses was reflecting on our diocesan vision, which has three core priorities: grow disciples, share the gospel, and plant and renew congregations. It has been particularly encouraging to see how closely this vision aligns with the vision we have discerned for our own parish. No doubt we will hear more from the Archbishop about this in the months ahead. It has been a joy to attend Synod on your behalf, alongside our two wonderful Synod Representatives, Andrew Marshall and Andy Liew. Please keep praying for our diocese and our parish as we seek to fulfil God's mission together.

And that brings us quite naturally to our passage this morning from the Gospel of Luke in which Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth and announces his mission. In this passage Jesus declares what he has come to do, what his ministry is about and what it means for us and for the church today. This is a very significant passage because it serves as a kind of mission statement for Jesus' public ministry. It tells us who Jesus is, what he has come to accomplish and how we should respond to him. The passage follows Jesus' baptism and his temptation by the devil in the wilderness. After forty days of temptation, Jesus has triumphed over the devil's schemes and remained obedient to his Father. He now returns to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit, and news about him begins to spread throughout the region. Eventually, he arrives in Nazareth, the town where he grew up. This is a place where people knew him. They knew him as a neighbour, a friend, the son of Mary, and the one who had grown up among them. They would have been familiar with his background and his family.

On this particular Sabbath day, Jesus enters the synagogue, as was his custom. He stands up to read the Scriptures, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah is handed to him. He reads these words: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor." He continues by speaking about freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, setting the oppressed free, and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour. After reading, he rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant and sits down. Everyone in the synagogue fixes their eyes on him. Then he makes this remarkable declaration: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

What a remarkable statement! Jesus is declaring that the promises of God, spoken through the prophet Isaiah, are being fulfilled in and through him. The passage from Isaiah was associated with God's promised salvation and the coming of his Anointed One, the Messiah. Now Jesus

stands before the people and announces that he is the one through whom these promises will be fulfilled. So let us look more closely at what Jesus says about his mission and the good news he has come to bring.

1. Jesus is anointed by the Holy Spirit.

The first part of our passage comes from Luke 4:18: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me...” The Spirit of the Lord refers to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. There are many important things we can say about the Holy Spirit, but what matters particularly in this passage is that the promised Messiah would be anointed and empowered by God’s Spirit for his ministry. Jesus is not simply an ordinary person who has decided to become a religious teacher. He is the promised Messiah, the Saviour whom God has sent into the world to fulfil his saving purposes.

The words “he has anointed me” are significant. In the Old Testament, anointing was associated with being set apart for a particular responsibility or ministry. Here, Jesus identifies himself with the prophetic words of Isaiah and declares that God’s Spirit rests upon him for the mission he has come to accomplish. This reminds us of Jesus’ baptism, which took place earlier in Luke’s Gospel. You will remember that when Jesus was baptised, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. The Father also declared that Jesus was his beloved Son.

That event revealed Jesus’ unique identity and marked the beginning of his public ministry. Now, in Nazareth, he announces the significance of his coming by applying Isaiah’s prophecy to himself. He is the Messiah, the one who has come in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring God’s salvation to the world. And this is important because we need to understand that the good news of Christianity is not something that human beings have invented. It is not a message that we have developed according to our own preferences or ideas about what would make life better. The good news begins with what God himself has done. God has sent his Son into the world to save us from sin and bring us back into a right relationship with him. Jesus came to live in perfect obedience to his Father. He died on the cross for our sins, and he rose again from the dead. Through his death and resurrection he has accomplished what we could never accomplish for ourselves: the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of eternal life.

Therefore, when we speak about the good news, we must always keep Jesus Christ at the centre. He is not merely a messenger who points us towards salvation. He is the Saviour through whom God has accomplished our salvation. And just as Jesus carried out his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit, we too need the help of the Holy Spirit as we live and serve as God’s people. We cannot accomplish God’s purposes through our own strength alone. As a church, our task is to proclaim faithfully the good news of Jesus Christ, to teach God’s Word, to care for others, and to help people come to know and follow Jesus.

2. Jesus brings good news to the poor.

The next part of our passage says: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor...” Who are the poor whom Jesus is referring to? When we hear the word “poor,” our minds naturally think of people who have little or no money, those who struggle to afford food and other necessities, and those who lack access to clean water, adequate housing and other basic necessities.

There were many people experiencing material poverty during the time of Jesus, just as there are today. And we must affirm that God cares about people who are poor and suffering. Throughout the Bible, we see God's concern for the vulnerable, the needy and those who are overlooked by society. Jesus himself demonstrated his concern through this ministry. He cared for the sick, fed the hungry, welcomed those whom others rejected, and showed compassion to people in distress. Therefore, we must never use the spiritual meaning of this passage as an excuse to ignore the material needs of others. As Christians, we are called to care for those who are struggling and to show practical love to our neighbours.

However, in the context of Jesus' ministry, the good news for the poor also has an important spiritual dimension. It speaks to those who recognise their need for God and are ready to receive his grace. Jesus says in Matthew 5:3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." To be poor in spirit is to recognise that we have nothing in ourselves by which we can earn God's favour. It is to acknowledge that God is our Creator, that we are accountable to him, and that we need his mercy and forgiveness. It is the opposite of spiritual pride. There are people who recognise their spiritual need, and there are people who think they have no such need. There are those who acknowledge that they are sinners before God, and those who believe they are good enough to stand before him on the strength of their own achievements.

Jesus once compared this difference to the difference between those who recognise that they are sick and those who think they are healthy. Those who know they are sick will seek a doctor, but those who believe they are perfectly well see no need for one. The same is true spiritually. If we do not recognise our sin, we will see no need for a Saviour. If we believe that we are spiritually rich in ourselves, we will not understand why we need the grace of God.

But the truth is that sin makes paupers of us all. No matter how successful we are, how much money we have, how well educated we are, or how respectable we appear to be, none of these things can make us right with God. We all need his forgiveness. We all need his grace. And this is why Jesus brings good news to the poor in spirit. He comes to those who acknowledge their need and are willing to receive what only God can give. The good news is that we do not have to earn our salvation. We do not have to make ourselves worthy before we can come to God. Through Jesus Christ, God offers forgiveness, reconciliation and new life to all who turn to him in repentance and faith.

So let me ask you: do you recognise your need for God? Do you acknowledge that you are a sinner who needs the forgiveness and grace of Jesus Christ? The good news is for those who know that they cannot save themselves and who are willing to place their trust in the Saviour God has sent.

3. Jesus brings freedom to those imprisoned by sin.

The next part of our passage says that Jesus has been sent "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners." Who are these prisoners? Of course, there are people who are physically imprisoned because they have committed crimes. Prison is a reality in our world, and there are people who experience the loss of freedom through the consequences of their actions.

But the language of freedom in Isaiah's prophecy also points to a deeper spiritual reality. Throughout the Bible, sin is described as a power that enslaves human beings and prevents them from living in the freedom for which God created them. Sin is not simply a matter of making occasional mistakes or falling short of our own standards. At its heart, sin is rebellion against God and his authority. It is our determination to live according to our own desires rather than by submitting to our Creator. And the Bible teaches that all of us are affected by sin. We are not naturally free from its power, and we cannot liberate ourselves through our own efforts.

Think about the ways sin can hold people captive. Some are enslaved by pride – always needing to prove themselves better than others. Some are controlled by greed – never satisfied with what they have. Some are trapped in bitterness and resentment – unable to forgive those who have hurt them. Others repeatedly give in to destructive desires – even when they know that what they are doing is wrong. We may be physically free, but spiritually imprisoned. And the tragedy is that we cannot break these chains simply by trying harder. We need someone who has the power to set us free. This is where the good news of Jesus Christ comes in. Jesus has come to deal with the problem of sin. Through his death on the cross, he has borne the judgment our sins deserve. Through his resurrection, he has triumphed over death and opened the way to new life.

When we turn to Christ in repentance and faith, we are forgiven and brought into a new relationship with God. We are no longer under the dominion of sin but are called to live in obedience to God as people who belong to Jesus Christ. This does not mean that Christians will never struggle with temptation again. We still need to resist sin, depend on God's grace, and grow in holiness. But we no longer have to remain slaves to sin. The Holy Spirit works in us to transform our hearts and enable us to live in obedience to God. What wonderful good news this is!

Perhaps there is an area in your life where you have been struggling with sin. Perhaps you have tried repeatedly to change, but you keep returning to the same habits and patterns. Do not conclude that there is no hope for you. Come to Christ. Confess your sin. Seek his forgiveness, depend on his grace, and ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to walk in a new direction.

4. Jesus brings sight to those who are spiritually blind.

The next part of our passage speaks of "recovery of sight for the blind." Physical blindness is a real and significant human affliction. Throughout his ministry, Jesus demonstrated compassion towards people who were blind, and the Gospels record occasions when he restored their sight. These miracles reveal his power and demonstrate that God's promised salvation was arriving through Christ. But the language of blindness also helps us understand our spiritual condition. Spiritual blindness is the inability or unwillingness to see the truth about God, ourselves and Jesus Christ. A spiritually blind person may know many things about the world and may be highly intelligent yet fail to recognise their need for God.

We see this throughout the Gospels. Jesus performed miracles, taught with authority and revealed the character of God, yet some people still refused to believe in him. Their problem was not simply a lack of information. Their hearts were resistant to the truth. The same problem

exists today. People may believe that they are good enough without God. They may see no need for forgiveness because they compare themselves with others and conclude that they are not particularly bad. They may be so occupied with their careers, possessions and ambitions that they give little thought to their relationship with their Creator.

And sometimes even those of us who have been Christians for many years can become spiritually blind. We may become so familiar with the things of God that we lose sight of their significance. We may know the language of faith without allowing God's Word to challenge and transform us. We therefore need God to open our eyes. We need the Holy Spirit to help us understand the truth of God's Word, recognise the seriousness of our sin, appreciate the greatness of God's grace, and see the glory of Jesus Christ.

Let us therefore pray that God will open our eyes more fully to who Jesus is, to what he has accomplished for us, and to how he calls us to live. And let us pray for those around us who have not yet come to know him, that God will open their eyes to the truth of the gospel and lead them to faith in Christ.

5. Jesus proclaims the year of the Lord's favour

Finally, Jesus declares that he has come "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." This expression comes from Isaiah's prophecy and points to the time when God would act to bring his promised salvation and restoration to his people. It also recalls the Old Testament Year of Jubilee, which was associated with release and restoration. The important point is that Jesus announces the arrival of the time of God's promised favour.

After reading from Isaiah, Jesus says: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Notice the word "today." Jesus is not merely saying that these promises will be fulfilled at some point in the distant future. He is announcing that God's promised salvation is arriving in and through him. The Messiah has come, and the time of God's favour is being proclaimed. Of course, we must understand this announcement in the light of the whole gospel. Jesus' mission will lead him to the cross, where he will die for our sins, and then to the resurrection, through which he will triumph over death. The salvation announced in Nazareth will be accomplished through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

But we must not overlook the significance of Jesus' word "today." The good news calls for a response. We must not merely admire Jesus from a distance or agree that his teaching is important. We must respond to him personally. If you have not yet placed your trust in Jesus Christ, do not put off considering the claims of the gospel. Turn to him, seek his forgiveness, and entrust your life to him. And if you already belong to Christ, remember that you live each day by his grace. Continue to trust him, walk in his ways, and allow his Word and Spirit to shape your life.

As we come to the end of this passage, we have seen that Jesus is the promised Messiah, anointed by the Holy Spirit to bring good news to the poor, freedom to prisoners, sight to the blind and the proclamation of God's favour. All these promises point us to the salvation God has accomplished through Jesus Christ.

So what should we do in response?

First, we need to receive the good news personally. We have to acknowledge our spiritual poverty, recognise our bondage to sin and admit our need for God's grace. We need to trust in Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to save us.

Second, we must allow the good news to transform our lives. If Christ has forgiven us, we should be people who extend forgiveness to others. If Christ has set us free from sin, we should seek to live in holiness. If Christ has shown us God's grace, we too should be people who show grace to others. If Jesus has brought good news into our lives, we should be willing to share that good news with those around us.

Third, we are called to participate in the mission of Jesus Christ. As a church, we are called to proclaim the good news of Christ, to care for those in need, and to help people to come to know and follow him. We cannot save anyone, but we can faithfully point others to the Saviour who alone can forgive their sins, set them free and give them new life.

May we continually trust in Jesus Christ, rejoice in his saving grace, and faithfully participate in his mission, so that others too may come to know the wonderful good news of salvation in him.

Amen.