

JANUARY 23, 2022 -MANIFESTO

Our Gospel comes from Luke 1:1-4,
4:14-21

So today our Gospel is a bit of a mish-mash and we've talked about this a time or two in the past, but the people that put together the liturgy of the word every once in a while, do odd things.

For example, today, for whatever reason, they're fusing two sections of the Gospel of Luke together into one.

The first part coming from chapter one verses one through four.

And the second part coming from the fourth chapter verses 14 through 2.

They're putting them together.

That first part is the introduction to Luke's Gospel.

And the second part recounts the story of Jesus coming home to lay out his **mission statement**, if you will, his manifesto, why he came.

So, let's get into it.

Since many of us have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as those who are eye witnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word have handed them down to us.

I too have decided after investigating everything anew to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, most excellent Theophilus so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

So, this is how Luke begins his gospel and it's beautiful.

It's so clinical.

It's so precise.

I love Luke.

We're in cycle C.

We're gonna be reading from Luke all year. We need to understand that Luke is writing this Gospel many, many years after the resurrection.

And as he's writing these words, there's not a whole lot written down at the time concerning the Jesus event.

Up to this point, the Good News had been handed down, mostly word of mouth or what they call **oral tradition**.

But now Luke is committing quill to papyrus.

And of course, you know, Luke was not an apostle, meaning he didn't follow Jesus around.

He got most of his information **from Peter**.

And like I said, at this point, there's very little outside of Paul's letters that were written down.

Just a few small congregations gathering to hear Paul's letters being read.

Along with some firsthand accounts of some people that had actually been with Jesus to recall what He said.

In time these communities would grow.

From the very beginning there was friction and there was misunderstanding.

Lines were drawn, sides were chosen because for whatever reason, from the very beginning, it seems that when two or more are gathered in His name, there is a fight.

And I don't know why, well I have an idea why, because **Satan loves division**, but this fighting continues today.

Now over time, this message became distorted, sorta like that old childhood game telephone.

Remember that game?

You sit in a circle and then somebody whispers a story or a little line into somebody else's ear.

And then they whisper it to the next person and it goes on and on throughout, around the circle.

And by the time it gets back to the first person, it's a totally different story.

Well, that is what has happened.

And that is the environment that Luke finds himself living in today.

So, one of his motivations to write this amazing Gospel was to just clear things up, get back to the source, but that's not his only motivation.

We need to understand that during this time, as Luke is writing this Gospel, times are tough.

Rome was actively hunting down and killing the early Christian community.

They were trying to stamp out the movement. Couldn't do it, but they tried.

So, Luke is writing not only to just clear things up, but also offer hope during a desperate time, because it was a desperate time.

People were getting arrested.

Families were turning each other in, I mean, we think we got it tough.

And in the middle of all this chaos, the Gospel of Luke arises as he addresses this mysterious man named Theophilus, a man who has been lost to history.

So, we don't really know who he was.

Of course, through the years, there's been a whole lot of speculation.

Theophilus was most likely a Roman citizen, a man of great means.

It is thought that Theophilus was the benefactor to Luke, as he wrote both this Gospel, as well as the book of Acts, which is the book immediately following the Gospels that chronicle the early church.

But we don't really know.

I mean, one thing we do now is that that name Theophilus is Greek and it means friend of God, or loved by God.

So, if you are a friend of God, or if you are loved by God, which by the way you are, then this Gospel is really written for you.

And Luke has a message for you.

And this message has been written down so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received.

So that's our first part.

Let's move to the second part of our Gospel today.

Jesus **returned to Galilee** in the power of the Spirit and news of Him spreads throughout the whole region.

He taught in the synagogues and was praised by all.

So, let's begin with that phrase, power of the Spirit.

Remember now, we should **never read scripture in isolation**.

We must always be mindful of the context.

The key element to finding context, well, one of the key elements is to figure out what just happened.

And what just happened in this case, is that Jesus has just been baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan.

And if you recall, as He came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove.

Soon that same Spirit of the Lord would drive Him into the desert to be tempted by Satan and well, while He was there in that same Spirit, Jesus will answer and overcome those temptations.

Might be a lesson right there.

Okay, just saying, but anyway, now He is returning to Galilee in the power of that same Spirit.

Now understand, in the ancient world, it was commonplace to have traveling preachers speak at the local synagogue. But of course, it's a little different today because this is Nazareth.

This is where Jesus grew up, so He's the hometown boy.

Now, the way it worked, and I imagine still works today, in a synagogue is that the rabbi gets up and first reads from the **Torah**, which contained the first **five books** of the Old Testament.

Then they would read from the **Haftarah**, which is a collection of teachings from the prophets of old.

But then unlike today, when everybody sits down and the preacher gets up and stands up in front of the people, it's the opposite.

Everyone in the congregation would remain standing or they would start to stand and the rabbi would sit down on a stool and preach.

So today, our Gospel tells us about how the Sabbath came around and Jesus, according to His custom or the custom, went to the synagogue to speak to the people.

And as He stands up to read, He's handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

Now these scrolls containing the holy texts were quite different than a book as we know it today.

Beginning with the fact that they didn't have any commas or periods or paragraphs, there were no chapters or verses.

It was just one long interrupted dialogue.

In fact, the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was **27 feet** long. I mean, can you imagine that? How would you even find your place?

But not only does Jesus find the place that He wants to talk about, He finds two different sections and fuses them together. Kind of like our Gospel today.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.

Boom, there it is.

This is His manifesto.

This is His **statement of intent**. This is why Jesus came.

Now speaking of manifestos, a manifesto, which is kind of like the mission statement, is often condensed into a slogan because we like bite-sized soundbites.

We have something short that we can remember, and this slogan will define what the leader wants to accomplish.

And since men have been stepping to podiums, slogans have been used to bring people together.

In the 1800's, **Karl Marx**, the father of communism, offered "Workers of the world unite", which was a message that resonated with a lot of people at the time. Didn't really work out so well, but later on when **Abraham Lincoln** was campaigning for president, he came with the slogan, "Vote yourself a farm and a horse" during a time when many immigrants in this country were struggling to get by.

Ulysses Grant would follow with, "Let us have peace" to a country that was broken by civil war.

JFK would come with "It's a time for greatness" during a time where the nation was prospering.

More recently, we've had "Make America great again", which alienates half the room and now "Build back better", which is alienating the other half because sadly, we find ourselves living at a time of great division.

And while **slogans** used to unite, **today** they **divide** because we are living during a time where quiet hatred is running just below the surface.

I mean can you feel it?

It's just everywhere.

People are so angry these days.

One side hears a message and feels hope while the other side hears the same message and reacts with scorn.

And it is tearing this great country apart, we're in trouble and in great need of prayer. This is definitely a defining moment for Jesus.

As well as a defining moment, you could say in word, history.

Although you'll never see this moment on the History Channel, which is a bit odd when you consider that we have 2.3 billion Christians living in our world today, but that's the world that we live in.

But getting back to this moment, if you are a disciple of Christ, if you are going to claim to be a Christian, if you're going to wave

that flag, then this my friend is your moment.

Jesus is deliberately finding these verses and making His statement of intent. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.

So, this is big.

I mean, beginning with that word, anointed, that word anointed in Hebrew is the root word for **Messiah**.

It is also the Greek word for **Christ**.

So, what these people in this small synagogue today in Nazareth are hearing is Jesus is saying, I'm the anointed, I'm the one. I'm the son of God.

What are you gonna do with that?

I mean, can you imagine if I were to step up to my podium here at my church in Richmond MI and declare that I'm the Christ?

I mean, how do you think that's gonna go down?

You think the Conference might receive a few letters on that one?

What would happen if I got up in front of my small congregation here in Richmond MI and declared that I was the daughter of God: But, we each are the beloved sons and daughter of God.

I'm thinking that wouldn't go over so well. Yet this is precisely what Jesus is saying today in this small synagogue in Nazareth, "I am Christos".

So, I'm thinking these people have really two choices as to how to react.

Number one, they could have laughed at Him and written Him off as a complete lunatic or liar, or number two, they could have fallen to their knees to worship Him. That's kinda it.

And you know what?

It's kind of funny, not in a ha-ha sense, but an interesting sense, that it's the exact same today.

When it comes to the Jesus question, you really only have two options.

He's either both a complete lunatic and liar or He's who He says He is.

There is not a whole lot of middle ground.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.

Rolling up the scroll, He handed it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of the synagogue looked intently at Him.

I bet they did.

I imagine they were stunned.

Probably could've cut the tension in that room with a knife.

And then He lowers the boom when He says "today, this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

So, I have a question.

Was it fulfilled?

I mean, completely fulfilled?

Because if you consider the words in your hearing, if you really meditate on that phrase in your hearing, you come to realize that yeah, indeed, it was fulfilled in that synagogue so long ago, but **it continues to be fulfilled in your hearing today**.

Meaning when this hits your ear, because it is in the hearing of God's word, that the mission of Jesus both begins and continues through you because, here's our lesson, who did Jesus come for?

Was it for the poor?

Was it for the blind?

Was it for people in jail?

Is he speaking literally?

I don't think so.

I think he's speaking spiritually. You know why?

Because we are the poor in spirit.

We are the blind and we are captive to sin. Of course, we don't see ourselves this way. We're like the man who goes to the doctor and says, doc, I'm as healthy as a bull.

I eat right, I exercise.
I'm doing all the right things. You know, I'm good.
At least good enough.
Meanwhile, the tests will show that his body is riddled with cancer and he only has a few weeks to live, but he doesn't see it because he sees himself as healthy.
And my friends that is our world today, we are walking around feeling comfortable with our own personal theologies while at the same time so riddled with sin that we are blinded in our need for a Savior.
We're like the Pharisee in the temple that looks at that poor tax collector in the back and says, oh Lord, I'm glad I'm not like him. Meanwhile, that tax collector in the back, who's beating his breast saying, "Lord have mercy on me, a sinner," is why Jesus came.
And why are we so blind?
Well, we're blind because understanding that you're broken inside, understanding that you are captive to your sin ain't easy. That's a painful reality to admit.
But my friends we are all sinners.
I mean, just consider your life over the last month. What sins overtook you?
You know that thing that came to mind right there, that thing, what habitual sin do you continue to practice that is keeping you from Jesus?
I know it's tough.
I get it, I know it brings shame, but the good news about the Good News is that you, Theophilus are why Jesus came.
Today we heard His manifesto.
Today we heard His **statement of intent**.
It's the Good News.
And you know what the Good News is? His victory over sin.
That's the Good News because when He said "He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives," that word **liberty in Hebrew**, is the same word used for forgiveness.

So, liberty for captives, meaning those of us captivated by sin is forgiveness for the captives.
That's the Good News, but here's the tough part.
Here's the other shoe dropping.
If you go to that phrase in the **61st chapter of Isaiah** "and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord," you know what follows it immediately?
A day of vindication for our God.
And you know what that is? That's judgment my friends. Oh yeah.
Judgment.
We don't like to hear that word.
It's a cold prickly word, but scripture makes it very clear that this world is going to be judged.
Meanwhile, we're sleeping like a pond at night with the croaking of toads.
Have you ever been around a pond at night and heard the croaking of toads?
You know what those croaking of toads are?
Think of those croaking of toads as our sin, no matter how good we try to be, those toads keep croaking.
So, I guess the question becomes this.
Do you need glad tidings for your poor spirit? Do you need liberty from your captivity to sin?
Do you need recovery of your sight as you stumble blindly through this world?

My friends, if the answer to any one of those questions is yes, may I suggest we follow Peter's advice to the crowds at Pentecost.
"Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sin."
And you will receive the Holy Spirit and through his death and resurrection, you will receive glad tidings.

You will be liberated from your captivity to sin. You will recover your spiritual side. And you will be set free.

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Don't forget to zoom your page to 200 for easy reading. Our in-person gathering is not having hospitality at this time and we continue to mask and distance. Thank you for following our suggestion on this effort as we stay safe.

Kyle and Kevin, sure would like to hear from you. Your grandmother loved you guys more than ever; she even got the vaccine in order to see you. What a great lady! She certainly had her quirks like we all do but I am blessed to have known her.

*Because some can't make Sunday Morning Worship we are beginning to have a shorter **version of Worship on Thursday evening at 7 p.m.** Masking and distancing is required then also. It will not be live streamed.*

See you in church.