

“Make Up There Down Here”

Luke 4:16-30

Series: God is Closer Than You Think Week 8. The Kingdom

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There is a story about a Sunday school teacher who worried her students didn't understand the Gospel. So she asked them: “If I sold my house and car, had a big garage sale, and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into heaven?” “No!” replied her class. “If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?” “No!” they cried again. “Well, if I am kind to animals, give toys to children and love my husband, would that get me into heaven?” “No!” they sang out. “Well then how can I get into heaven?” A five-year-old boy shouted, “You gotta be dead!”

True! But not the whole Truth. If the Gospel only applies to what happens after you die, it doesn't have much to do with today, this life, our world. Some mistakenly think Jesus only came here is to get us ready for up there. Yes Jesus died to save us from sin and to open the door to the hereafter. Yet He said a lot about the here and now.

Since the beginning of the New Year we've been looking at how much God wants to be down here, how God is closer than we think. Now that we know God is always with us, in us and around us, what does He want us to do? Make Up There Down Here. Instead of sitting and counting down the days 'til we go up there, Jesus works through us to make down here – earth – more like up there – heaven. He wants to bring His Kingdom through us. The core of Jesus' message is the Kingdom of heaven. He begins,

“The time has come,” he said. “The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” Mark 1:15

I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent. Luke 4:43

Even the prayer He taught His disciples to pray includes,

Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10

Make up there down here. The Kingdom of heaven is not just in heaven. It's not something which comes only after you die. It's now. It's near. It's here. We are citizens of the Kingdom of heaven while we live on earth. The Kingdom of God is not a place or a political party. It's a people who follow a King. This Kingdom is unlike any other in history. The Kingdom of God is not like the Kingdom of Sweden or Great Britain. It has no borders. It has no capital city. It is not limited to one race or ethnic group. It comforts those who face challenges and challenges those who feel too comfortable. He wants His Kingdom to come and His will to be done in us. He wants to make up there down here through us.

Here are two things we must not do. We must not think Jesus is on our side. People on the right and the left declare, in person and on social media, that Jesus agrees with them. That Jesus thinks the way they do. Jesus is not Republican or Democrat, Red or Blue, for one group over another. During His ministry, Jesus challenged nearly everyone. Maybe that's why Jesus died alone. Nobody stood by His side because He refused to stand on their side. Let's not claim, co-opt or control Jesus for our side. In humility, we all need to see how we can be on His side.

Second, let's not keep His Kingdom locked up in this building. So much has happened in the last nine weeks it almost seems like we crossed the line between BC and AD. BC = Before the Championship and AD = After Defeating (the Chiefs). Now I wonder, on Super Bowl Sunday, wouldn't it have been better for the Eagles to stay home and play at the Linc before their screaming fans? Sounds like a winning formula. There's only one problem: if the team didn't travel to New Orleans, they would have forfeited the game. If that's the case, why do millions of Christians think the point of church is to only gather in our building, to serve God only where we have home field advantage? Sports teams usually play about half their games at home. These same teams also travel to the opposing team's field if they want to be in the game. When the Church of Jesus started, there was no home field advantage. There were no church buildings. Christians always played out on the world's field. They faced intense opposition, sometimes in real stadiums against gladiators and lions. Yet the church grew exponentially.

In fact, the Kingdom spread so well that by the fourth century A.D., the entire Roman Empire became Christian. That's when the Church began to build sanctuaries. Nothing wrong with that. For the first time we had a home field advantage. Unfortunately, the word "church" became synonymous with the building. Now Christians say, "I go to church" or "My church is on the corner of Edgewood and Heacock Roads" or "Church is on Sunday." Sometimes people see me in the Supermarket and say, "Quick, duck down a different aisle, here comes the Church." We think church only happens here. We like the home field advantage so we just stay here. But that's a forfeit. The mission of the Kingdom is not to get Jesus on our side, but for us to be on His side, not to get spectators into our building, but to get our team out in the world.

This is what Jesus tells us from the very beginning. As Messiah He launches His mission in the arena you would expect Him to have the best home field advantage: Nazareth, His hometown. Unfortunately, it doesn't turn out that way.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. Luke 4:14-16

After His baptism, Jesus returns to the tiny village where he spent the first thirty years of his life. The buzz about Him is spreading like wildfire. The question is whispered everywhere: is Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah? Will He reveal His true identity in their village synagogue? Every eye is riveted on Jesus as He carefully selects a passage:

He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. 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." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:16-21

With this prophecy of Isaiah, Jesus reveals He *is* the Messiah. Then He describes what His Kingdom will be like. He does not declare war on the Romans. **Jesus' Mission is to Share Good News and Good Deeds.** Of all the passages Jesus could choose, He selects one which says He is anointed to "proclaim good news to the poor" followed quickly by freedom for prisoners, healing for the blind, and deliverance for the oppressed. Jesus is all about Show and Tell. He never separates showing Good Deeds from telling Good News. All four categories - poor, prisoners, blind and oppressed - refer to both physical and spiritual conditions. Jesus ministers to both.

For some reason, the Church today is divided into two extremes. Some churches only tell the Good News to save people's souls. Other churches only do Good Deeds to meet physical needs. It's either/or. Baptists and non-denominational churches tend to fall in the first camp while Presbyterians, Methodists and Lutherans make up the second. Yet why must it be one or the other? Why must we choose between meeting people's spiritual needs and their physical needs? There have been a lot air disasters recently including a plane which flipped upside down. Imagine flying in a plane at 30,000 feet and the pilot suddenly comes on the p.a. and says, "Ladies and Gentlemen, we decided it's really unnecessary for us to have two wings on this plane. The crew decided we are going to be a left wing plane so we'll be dropping the right wing momentarily. Enjoy the rest of your flight...it'll just last a few more minutes." Everyone knows you need both wings to soar. When the Church shares Good Deeds **and** Good News it soars with the Spirit.

At its brightest moments, the Church shared Good News and Good Deeds. When the Roman Empire persecuted the first Christians, they responded by caring for orphans, slaves, children who were left to die. In AD 165, a pandemic called the Antonine Plague devastated the Roman Empire killing 5,000 people a day in Rome. The Empire lost 20% of its population. Christians cared for the victims of the plague tossed out by their families. These acts of compassion won many hearts and eventually the whole empire over to the Lord. In the fifth century, a former British slave named Patrick preached from one end of Ireland to the other. St Patrick was the first to speak against the Irish slave trade. He planted 700 churches, ordained 1,000 priests and saw 150 tribes come to Christ.

At the time of our American Revolution, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, led thousands to Christ, campaigned for prison and labor reform, built orphanages and schools, battled the slave trade, provided medicines to the poor and gave away all his wealth to the needy. We don't do good deeds in order to get them to believe the Good News. Sharing the message of salvation is our ultimate motive but not our *ulterior* motive. We serve people and invite them to follow Jesus.

Last fall you heard about and supported the Holistic Evangelism Project in Tete Province Mozambique led by Sebber Banda. Her team is transforming thousands of lives by planting churches, digging wells, training pastors and elders, teaching health education and AIDS prevention, and providing safer child birth. Through our Peace on Earth offering last Christmas you gave over \$7,000. Now you are invited to visit Sebber in Mozambique June 17-24. Giving and Sharing Good News and Good Deeds – that’s what it means to make up there down here.

You’d think everyone would agree. Yet not everyone thinks the Church exists to go out and serve the lost and the least. Some believe the mission of the Church is to take care of me and my family. Jesus found this belief in his hometown. It was no home field advantage. At first, they loved what He said,

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked. Luke 4: 22

Can you imagine their pride? ‘Our little Jesus is going to be the Messiah.’ ‘I always said he would be great someday, didn’t I Gertrude?’ ‘I was his first grade Sunday school teacher.’ Their pride swelled so big they almost couldn’t get out of the synagogue. But the next thing Jesus said burst their bubble:

Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’” “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.” Luke 4:23-27

Translation: my Kingdom is not just for Jews. It’s for Gentiles too. The people in the Nazareth synagogue saw themselves as the poor, imprisoned and oppressed. They believed God sent the Messiah to save them *from* the Gentiles. They never dreamed God intended to also save the Gentiles. When they cried for justice they really meant just-us.

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. Luke 4:28-30

Imagine that: the people of Jesus’ hometown were among the first who tried to kill Him. They wouldn’t be the last.

Make no mistake, if you share Good News and Good Deeds you will face opposition. But at the end of the day, would you rather ignore hunger or invest in hope? Run from doubt or reach out with faith? Throw up your hands or roll up your sleeves?

During the season of Lent we'll focus on making Friends for God. Many today long to belong. Yet they find it hard to make friends. Jesus calls us His friends. He asks us to offer His friendship to others. The best way to make friends for God is by being friendly. We'll show you simple ways to help everyone find their Best Friend.

Instead of giving up chocolate for Lent, I ask you to add something. Check off something on the Show Good Deeds, Tell Good News sheet in your bulletin and then drop it in the basket. We'll get you connected. You can start simply as a greeter or sign up for a mission trip. Stand up and be counted. Do your part to make up there, down here.

My Thursday Growth Group went to serve lunch at the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen (TASK) last week. It was "Chicken Day" which is always a popular meal. We served hundreds of hot, delicious, nutritious meals to those who came in the door. But then Jim Stevens took us out to see the TASK Food Truck where he and Helen Hughes often work. The truck goes out and delivers wonderful hot meals all over the city to anyone who shows up. No questions asked. They aren't just serving homeless neighbors. In these tough economic times many who work hard still can't feed their families. Over the last 11 months Jim, Helen and the team have served over 33,000 meals. Every time they serve a meal they make up there down here.