

# Challenged and Led by the Good News

Sermon by Pastor Patrick Fish

Luke 4:21-30

February 2-3, 2019

*Grace and Peace to you from Christ, who reminds us we are guided and directed by the Spirit. Not opinions, preferences, and reactions. Amen.*

## **Move 1: Tie in last week to this week**

Today's Scripture is from Luke and is a continuation of last week's reading. According to Luke's Gospel, the first thing that Jesus does after being baptized and surviving forty days of temptation in the desert is to preach. But Jesus' first public act of ministry isn't just preaching to a bunch of strangers. He preaches and teaches in his hometown synagogue. To people he knew quite well. To people who called him brother, cousin, friend, neighbor.

The pressure Jesus must have felt.

I've shared with many of you my fear of public speaking. Picked a great career choice for that one. But I've learned I'm okay to preach if I don't know the people well. I have nothing to lose in that scenario. I can speak my peace and leave. Let them sort it out.

It's much harder to preach to people I care deeply about. To people who know me. It's why, when my extended family asks what Saturdays/Sundays they should come visit, I always tell them weeks Pr. Pat is preaching. They haven't caught on yet. *Shhhh*, don't tell.

As I grow in relationships with you, I grow deeper and deeper in connection with you. What I say. How I say it. It matters that much more. Because I don't just know you, I now love you. I care deeply about your welling being. No pressure, right?

Yet in this interaction between Jesus and his hometown, he doesn't seem to succumb to the pressure of the moment. Jesus hits the ground running. Out of the gates, he doesn't play it safe. He doesn't slow play his message. Or massage the good news to his Nazareth synagogue to make it more manageable. [1]

Jesus just tells the truth. He shares the good news. Not the easy news, but the news our world needs to hear and needs to claim.

In our Gospel lesson from last week, Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah and shared why he had come. He unveiled his identity, mission, and purpose: to bring good news to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, release to the prisoner, and sight to the blind. He said all this was fulfilled through him, and he would bring these things forth.

And his hometown's first reaction and response was strong. They stood in amazement and admiration—the proper response to the good news of God's grace at work in the world. [2]

### **Move 2: This week's Scripture**

We move to this week's Scripture reading. And the crowds still have that same admiration and amazement. Yet the crowds also have lots questions. They start whispering and wondering: "Isn't that Joseph and Mary's boy? You know, the kid who just eight years ago was outside in his shorts and no shirt when it was fifty below."

And Jesus see their hearts. Knows what they are thinking and how they will react before they even realize it.

He interprets what they are thinking: "Doctor, cure yourself" (Luke 4:23). In other words, they are thinking "Well, if you are the fulfillment, show us. Prove it." [3]

Jesus then alludes to two famous prophets. Identifies himself alongside Elijah and Elisha. We remember that both these prophets were rejected in their hometowns because their ministry was done on behalf of those beyond the boundaries of their hometowns. [4]

Both these figures in the Old Testament did miracles and marvelous things but were rejected by people closest to them because they did God's work far from home to people whom popular culture felt didn't deserve love and attention.

Jesus calls out this type of thinking. That was the Israelite people in the Old Testament. That is the people of Nazareth at the synagogue. The crowds in our story want special consideration. They feel they are entitled to divine favor and deserve Jesus to perform signs because Jesus grew up with them.

Jesus' implication is that, like Elisha and Elijah, his ministry is directed to those beyond the borders. Jesus reminds us that his mission is for all and available to all. [5]

There is no special treatment. There is no privileged few. There is no Gentile or Jew. No hometown or outsider.

Jesus doesn't serve those in the church first and then the people beyond our walls. It's not a hierarchy. It's not an "us"/"them." It's a "we." All-encompassing. All-embracing.

During this season of Epiphany, we proclaim that Jesus has come to and for all. We remember that Jesus is here to spread the good news to all people and especially to the marginalized and vulnerable. The blind. Prisoner. Oppressed. Poor.

### **Move 3: Crowd's reaction to Jesus' sermon**

Then Jesus finishes this sermon. Fervently proclaims that he is the fulfillment of the good news. Folds back up the scroll and sits down. Silence.

There are no alleluias or amens. No applause. Just anger.

Remember, at the beginning of Jesus' sermon, people were amazed by the authority in which Jesus spoke. They admired his knowledge and wisdom. That all changed.

Now, not just *some* of the congregants get angry. Scripture says *all* of them. All of them, unanimously, upon hearing the good news, are filled with rage. They get up and drive Jesus out of town. Attempt to throw him off a nearby cliff.

But Jesus evades them and goes on his way.

That escalated quickly. Woo. What a start to Jesus' ministry. What a reception to the good news.

#### **Move 4: Takeaways**

Now, I am in no way Jesus. But this passage is why I told my wife we were never going back to where I grew up. I told her, and I told God, I'll go anywhere the Spirit leads me except the Chicago suburbs.

Welp, God, you again show me that whenever I shut a door, you open it. No line I draw, no wall I put up can stop you or the good news from shining through.

The truth we remember today and every day is that there are no people God cannot repair. No relationships God can't work through. No border or barrier that can keep out God's work.

Today's story shows the contrasting receptions and reactions of humanity to God's message. At one point, the crowd rises. And almost in an instant, they fall. [6]

This isn't a story where we can pretend we would act differently than the crowds. Nor is it a passage where we can conclude Jesus is against any religion, like Judaism, that opposes him.

In fact, in this passage, Jesus ties himself to the prophets of old. To Israel. To Isaiah. "Jesus is through and through a Jew." This story is him just encountering humanity. Man and women. This is grace encountering entitlement and privilege. [7]

This interaction to kick off Jesus' ministry foreshadows what it to come of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. He will regularly face opposition, challenge, and rejection. And, ultimately, the Gospel and good news he proclaims will lead him to the cross.

So, we ask ourselves, "What is the good news in all this? What is Gospel about this passage? Jesus is rejected. It shows our collective humanity to respond and react poorly. What good can we take out of this?"

### **Move 5: What is the good news of this passage?**

The good news is that it's not about us. Jesus, himself, is the good news.

Jesus' message isn't halted by the crowd's reaction or rejection. Jesus' life isn't ended in our story. He rises out of this as he rose from the cross.

His ministry isn't directed or dictated by us. Christ doesn't wait to include our input. His ministry was always guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Because of that, nothing in this world could separate him or stop him from fulfilling his purpose.

Jesus wasn't received by his hometown. But that didn't stop him from continuing his ministry and proclaiming who he is for.

"He was for those society would like to forget. He still is for those who are behind in line of us." [8] Christ reveals God's grace. God's embrace. God's love. It is for all.

That is the good news. That brings us the warmth this week that we need to hear after a week of hibernation. No cold, no snow, no wind can keep out the warmth of the Gospel. The arms of our Savior are stretching out to everyone alike. The warm and sheltered ones, as well as the cold and wandering ones.

### **Move 6: Disrupted**

I want to close by sharing a little bit about a conference I attended last weekend. I was in Jacksonville, Florida. I experienced a 100 degree difference in a matter of days. It was 65 degrees there on Sunday. -50 here on Wednesday. Why do I live here again?

The theme of the conference was "Disrupted."

And I expected to hear countless stories with a themes such as, "God happens in the disruptions. Look for God and be okay with God disrupting you."

But that's not at all what the conference was about. Each speaker shared a story that was unique to them. And in each of their stories, there was difficulty. There was rejection. There was death. There were life disruptions that left them wondering, questioning, seeking God.

One story in particular was the associate pastor at Augustana College, where I went to school. She shared the tremendous disruption that happened in her life when she lost her husband, who was forty-two when he died. Way too young.

And, yet, here she was two years later, sharing. Boldly. Courageously. Inspiringly.

All week I was reminded this walk we do. This journey we do. It's not easy. There is no playing it safe. There is no watering or massaging it down.

But, then, the message Jesus proclaimed, the life he led, wasn't either.

The Gospel disrupts. And it includes rejection. Even death. However, it ultimately ends with rising, newness, transformation, and life.

Each of us has our own unique story. And in our stories there are disruptions. There is rejection.

What we cling to is not how we react or how others respond. We cling to the fact that Jesus Christ came into the world for all of us. You. Me. Everyone.

And nothing we do, nothing in this world—no disruption or difficulty—can stop the good news from entering into our lives and reminding us that we are freed, given sight, and released.

Amen.

#### Resources

[1] Lewis, Karoline. "Good News?" Dear WorkingPreacher. [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org), January 28, 2019.

[2] Reese, Ruth Anne. "Commentary on Luke 4:21-30," [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org), Jan. 31, 2016.

[3] Reese, Ruth Anne. "Commentary on Luke 4:21-30."

[4] Reese, Ruth Anne. "Commentary on Luke 4:21-30."

[5] Reese, Ruth Anne. "Commentary on Luke 4:21-30."

[6] Jacobsen, David Schnasa. "Commentary on Luke 4:21-30," [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org), Feb. 3, 2019.

[7] Jacobsen, David Schnasa. "Commentary on Luke 4:21-30."

[8] Lewis, Karoline. "Good News?"

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#### *Reflection Questions*

- What experiences or stories brought you warmth this week?
- Why is God's grace so hard to receive and believe?
- When have you experienced rejection? How did you stay grounded and not be led astray?