

Title: *Freedom Is Here, Today*

Text: Luke 4:14-19

Preacher: Eddie Bellis

Date: July 5, 2026

Several years ago, I was standing along Main Street in Clayton, North Carolina, waiting for a Fourth of July parade to begin. Everything smells like sunscreen, boiled peanuts, and asphalt that's been baking since eight in the morning. Folding chairs line both sides of the street as though people have staked out small, temporary kingdoms. We were already sticky before noon. The sun was bright, smiles were everywhere, and I remember someone waving at something that had not even arrived yet.

There was a little boy standing near me. He was five, maybe six, at the most. In his hand, one of those small paper flags glued to a wooden stick. He waved it at everything and everyone who passed by us. Every fire truck. Every marching band. Every horse. Every veteran. Every stranger tossing candy from slow-moving cars. He waved the flag at all of it as if his participation was somehow holding the whole parade together and moving it forward.

And then something happened that did not quite fit the usual script. One of the marching veterans stepped out of line, walked over, knelt down, and placed a piece of candy into the boy's open hand. The boy looked at it for a long moment. Then he looked up and asked a question that slowed everything down for a moment.

Loud enough for everyone to hear, he said, "*Why are you giving us presents? Isn't this your parade?*" He was not offering a protest or a complaint. He was just a child noticing what the rest of us had long since stopped noticing. *Isn't this your parade?*

I remember thinking: Now, that is exactly the kind of question Jesus would ask. He's not always answering what we thought he came to answer. More often, he changes the question altogether.

Today's text is one of those moments. Luke tells us Jesus returns to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit," and the word spreads that he's home. Something is happening that people can feel but not yet name. Crowds gather. Expectations build. Rumors travel faster than understanding.

He comes to Nazareth, where everyone knows his name, his family, and the streets he walked as a boy. He goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath, as he always would have. Nothing unusual. People stand for the reading, and someone presses the Isaiah scroll into his hand.

And this is precisely where the story slows down. He unrolls it. Not quickly. Not casually. Slowly enough that people sense something is different, though they cannot yet say what. Then he reads: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives... recovery of sight to the blind... to let the oppressed go free... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*"

At first, nothing seems wrong. This is familiar language. Safe language. The kind of Scripture is read on days when everyone is glad to hear it. People nod. Some smile. This is the kind of thing we want God to do, do we not?

Then Jesus does something very simple. So simple it catches everyone off guard. He rolls up the scroll and hands it back. He also sits down. That is it. Everyone expected more, and all they got was the ordinary. Notice Luke says, “*The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.*”

They are waiting. Waiting for the explanation. Waiting for the sermon. Waiting for him to tell them what all of that means. And instead, Jesus says, “*Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*”

Today. Such a small word, carrying so much weight. Not someday. Not eventually. Not when the conditions are right. Today. And in that one word, the room changes. Not because he raised his voice. Not because anything visible happened, but because one word refused to stay in the future.

Often God’s most disruptive moments arrive wrapped in the most ordinary sentences. No thunder. No angels splitting the curtain in two. Just a man sitting down after reading Scripture, saying a word that moves people from expectation to decision. Because *today* doesn’t leave much room for postponing. It refuses to let religion stay safely in the future tense.

And that’s where the story leans into us. We prefer our faith in bite-sized, manageable portions. We are skilled at the art of *someday* faith. Someday God will fix what is broken. Someday justice will come. Someday healing will arrive. Someday is comfortable and asks little of us right now.

But Jesus keeps interrupting our “*someday*” with *today*. And suddenly, faith is not a future we are waiting for. Rather, it is something we are already standing inside of.

Yesterday, we celebrated the founding of this nation, the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It would be easy here to turn this into a contrast between two freedoms. But scripture demands that we be careful, because we are not the first people to talk about freedom.

We live in a nation that tells a powerful story about liberty, and that freedom is not a small thing. It is a costly thing. Generations have given their lives to widen its reach. And that story is not finished but still being written – someday. We should not dismiss our nation’s freedom.

But Luke presses us to notice something. Every nation, even the best of them, can only offer a certain kind of freedom. Governments can protect rights. Courts can restrain injustice. We can pass laws and reform institutions. These matter enormously. But no nation’s vision can reach all the way down into the human heart.

No nation can release the prisoner of fear. It cannot heal the captivity of hatred. It cannot forgive what has already been done. It cannot make a person new. That is simply not its vocation.

And Jesus does not come as another civic voice among many. He walks into Nazareth, into the synagogue, reading Isaiah, declaring that God is doing something no system, no empire, and no ideology can finally accomplish. He claims release, sight, freedom, and good news to the poor (not as a metaphor) as reality breaking in.

That’s where the real tension lives. Not between faith and patriotism, but **between every human attempt to define freedom and the freedom Jesus simply announces.** Because when he says *today*, he isn’t adding another opinion to the conversation. He’s declaring that something has already begun.

I wonder what that sounded like in Nazareth. I wonder if someone leaned over and whispered, "*Who does he think he is?*" Because it's one thing to read Isaiah, but it's another thing entirely to say, "*That is happening now. In me. In our hearing. Today.*"

Luke tells us the story does not end there. Rather, it sharpens, and it becomes more dangerous. But let's stay in that room for a moment longer. Stay with the people sitting, eyes fixed, and a silence thick enough to feel. Notice Jesus offers no further explanation. He simply lets the word do what words do when they are true.

He does not describe a political program. He describes a new kind of life breaking open into the world. Good news for the poor, not because poverty is noble, but because God has not abandoned them. Release for captives, not because prisons are irrelevant, but because there are more prisons than the ones built of stone. Sight for the blind and not only in the body, but in the soul. He claims freedom for the oppressed, not as a slogan on a sign, but as chains breaking in places we did not think to look.

So, the question for us is never really whether we live in a free society. The deeper question (the one the gospel keeps asking) is whether we are willing to live inside the freedom Christ is already announcing. A freedom that does not begin with self-assertion but with surrender. A freedom that does not protect privilege and status but releases the captive. A freedom that does not end with independence but keeps opening outward into love of neighbor.

Which brings us back to a little boy on a street in Clayton, NC. He looked up at a veteran who had stepped out of line, who had crossed the boundary that parades are supposed to keep, who had knelt in the dust and placed something undeserved into a small open hand. And the boy asked, without quite knowing what he meant: "*Isn't this your parade?*"

That question was closer to the gospel than we might be comfortable admitting. Because Jesus keeps stepping out of line. He keeps crossing the boundaries we assume are fixed. He keeps kneeling down in places we did not expect to find him. He keeps placing something undeserved into hands that did not earn it, did not ask for it, and were not even sure they wanted it.

And in a few minutes, he will do it again.

Right here. At this table. Bread is broken and placed into an open hand. A cup was offered to people who did not earn it. And the church has never called this *someday* food. We don't come to this table to remember a freedom once announced and now postponed. We come because the same word that emptied a synagogue into silence is the word spoken over this bread: *Today*.

Not the bread of someday. Not the cup of eventually. This is the meal of the present tense: God's favor, God's release, and God's sight, placed into your hands now, while you are still broken, still captive in ways you've made peace with, and still blind to things you've learned to call normal.

So, come the way that boy held out his hand. Not because you understood the parade. Not because you'd earned a place in it. Just open-handed, open of heart, and a little surprised that anyone would kneel down for you.

Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing and in a moment, in your hands. Let's come to the table of Jesus. Our good news is freedom is here – *Today*!