

Anointed by the Spirit

Luke 4:14-21

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A few weeks ago, on Pentecost, we looked at the outpouring of God's Spirit on *the followers of Jesus*. The scene we're exploring today parallels that one in Acts 2. As Jesus was filled with and anointed by the Holy Spirit, his followers are to be filled with and anointed by the Spirit. Jesus was unique, but he's also our example. What does it mean to be like him in terms of being anointed by the Holy Spirit? Answering that will help us see another aspect of being all that God wants us to be.

Part of what makes Jesus unique is that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit. The angel told Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The power of the Holy Spirit acting upon Mary created this new life that she carried and gave birth to. Jesus is always the unique Son of God.

Later, at his baptism, Jesus is anointed and empowered as Messiah. "When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove" (3:21-22). The Holy Spirit was active in setting Jesus apart and preparing and equipping him for his public ministry.

Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where he was tempted and tested by the devil (4:1).

Following his temptations in the Judean desert, Jesus returns to Galilee to begin his ministry *in the power of the Spirit* (4:14). The Holy Spirit is God's personal powerful presence. And the Spirit was active in Jesus' life and ministry.

Jesus is unique in his identity as Son of God and Messiah. He's our example in his dependence on the Holy Spirit and prayer. God the Son, in the flesh, the embodiment of God, humbled and emptied himself so he could model human relationship with God. This is part of why we believe God is Trinity. God the Son was fully human. When Jesus prayed, was he

just talking to himself? No, he prayed to God the Father. And, God the Holy Spirit filled and empowered Jesus for his life and ministry.

Jesus enjoyed a good reputation in Galilee. As he taught in the synagogues, people spoke well of him and word about him spread all over the region.

Then Jesus went back to his hometown, Nazareth. On the Sabbath, he went to the synagogue and read the Scripture, *as was his custom*. Jesus made a habit of worshiping with others. That's part of his example for us.

In the synagogues at that time, any Jewish man was allowed to read the Scripture and comment on it. Jesus takes advantage of this practice. He stands to read and chooses a text from the prophet Isaiah (61:1, 2).

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me;
to preach good news to the poor he has sent me:
To proclaim release for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
To release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

After rolling up the scroll, Jesus sat down. Sitting was the customary posture for teaching. He has everyone's attention. They're all looking at him intently, perhaps wondering why he chose that passage of Scripture and what this hometown boy is going to say.

The first word out of Jesus' mouth is "Today." The time has come. The age of God's kingdom is here. The promises of God are being fulfilled. "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

One of the significant things about this passage is what it shows us about Jesus' self-awareness—his identity and vision for ministry.

Jesus is fulfilling prophecy. He claims to be the One who's anointed by God with the Holy Spirit. That is, he's Messiah. Jesus announces that the agenda, the mission of the Anointed One described in Isaiah is his mission, his agenda. He both proclaims and enacts good news, release, and recovery.

The Hebrew word for “anoint” is the root of the word “messiah,” which means “anointed one.” People were anointed by pouring or smearing olive oil on their heads. Priests were anointed as a sign that they were chosen and set apart by God for special service. Prophets were sometimes anointed to show that God had chosen and set them apart and empowered them to speak God’s word. Israel’s kings were anointed as they began to reign. Again, this signified God’s choosing them—especially David and his descendants.

When the Jews were in exile in Babylon and after they returned, they hoped for a descendant of David to rule them once again—a king chosen by God, anointed, a “messiah.” By Jesus’ time, there were many ideas floating around about this messiah. So Jesus was careful not to call himself “Messiah” openly so people wouldn’t misunderstand him and his mission. But Jesus does fulfill the role of the Messiah, the prophetic and priestly king of God’s people. He’s anointed, not with oil, but with the Holy Spirit.

Luke emphasizes that Jesus was anointed as Prophet. Jesus is the prophet like Moses who was to come. As Prophet, Jesus represents God to us. He declares and enacts God’s word for us. He teaches us truth, calls us to repent, and offers us a new relationship with God.

The Holy Spirit’s anointing of Jesus also shows that he is our Priest. He represents us to God. He prays for us, intercedes for us. He offers the sacrifice that reconciles us with God. And the sacrifice he offers is himself. As Priest, Jesus restores our relationship with God through forgiveness, releasing us from sin.

Jesus’ anointing also shows that he is King. He rules. He embodies God’s kingdom. He announces and demonstrates God’s kingdom. After giving his life to provide forgiveness, he is raised from the dead and exalted to God’s right hand where he rules. Through his Spirit, he rules in our hearts. His rule is somewhat hidden now. Some day he will return in glory and rule openly and unhindered, unopposed.

We see, we believe, we declare that Jesus is Prophet, Priest, and King.

Another interesting thing about Jesus’ use of the word “today” here is that the rest of Luke’s writing in Luke-Acts shows that it’s still “today.” The era, the age of God’s kingdom that Jesus launched continues. Jesus

continues the ministry he began then. What he said then, he says to us. What he did for people then, he wants to do for us. And if we'll hear Jesus' good news and receive his ministry, we become part of that ministry. The church is anointed with the Holy Spirit to minister as Jesus did. Jesus is God's *Anointed One*. The Church is God's *anointed community*.

I know I've told this story before, but it does a good job making this point. A monastery had fallen on hard times. Once it had been a great and thriving order, but it had declined to the point that there were only five monks left in the decaying monastery. There was the abbot, who was the leader, and four others, all over seventy years old. No new people were joining them. Their order would soon be dead. One day, the abbot and the rabbi from a nearby synagogue got together to visit. They talked about the poor situations they were in and sympathized with each other. As he was leaving, the abbot asked the rabbi if he had any advice for them. The rabbi said, "No. I can only say this. The Messiah is one of you."

The abbot went back to the other monks who asked him if the rabbi had given any helpful advice. "No. He just said that the Messiah is one of us."

They all wondered about this. Each one thought, "It couldn't be Brother So-and-So, could it? But what if it is? It couldn't be me, could it? But what if it is?" With this in mind they began to treat each other and themselves with extraordinary respect, honor, and love. And things began to change. There was a spirit, an atmosphere, about the monastery that people began to notice. People came to picnic on the grounds, to walk the paths, and even to pray in the old chapel. Over the next few years, several new monks joined the order that once again was flourishing (M. Scott Peck, quoted in *A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul*, 56-59).

Now that's a good lesson and that rabbi was smart. But he was wrong. *One* of us is not the Messiah. *All of us* together are the body of Christ, the Messiah. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are filled with and anointed by God's Spirit. We are the Messiah's anointed community.

So the good news Jesus proclaimed is for us and it becomes our message to share. The freedom, healing, and release Jesus brought are for

us and we're empowered by God's Spirit to bring freedom, healing, and release to others.

In the new era that Jesus ushers in, the poor receive good news, the prisoners hear a message of freedom, the blind are given sight, and the oppressed are released from their oppression. Luke most likely intends us to understand these various groups literally—the economically poor, those wasting away in actual prison cells, the physically blind, and the weaker, less influential people who are abused, walked on, and exploited by those with more power and resources. That's talking about anyone who lacks status in society. Jesus ministered to such people. And the church is called to join him in that ministry.

We don't want to hurry past this physical understanding of Jesus' ministry. But Luke wants us also to understand it holistically. What Jesus says here applies spiritually as well. The poor in spirit—those who know their need, the prisoners of sin and destructive habits, the spiritually blind and oppressed also need to hear the good news and be set free.

This is all part of what the final line of the Isaiah quote refers to: "To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." This probably refers to the Year of Jubilee when Israel was to free slaves, cancel debts, and restore property to its original owners. But even in the Old Testament, the ideas of the Jubilee were interpreted in terms of God's kingdom to come in the future. That interpretation continued to develop in the time after the OT writings. Now Jesus is fulfilling those expectations. His life and ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit begin a Jubilee for all people.

Thinking about Jesus bringing release to the oppressed reminds me of a story Bob Tuttle tells. He had been preaching one weekend in a small southern town and was scheduled to preach in Detroit on Sunday evening. His flight to Detroit got cancelled, so he waited around and finally got on a new flight and got bumped up to first class. He says he wasn't accustomed to first class, but he got on the plane and sat next to a man who looked like he belonged in first class. Exhausted as he was, Tuttle didn't say anything and neither did the man.

The meal was served shortly after takeoff. Halfway through the main course, God gave Bob this insight: "Tell the man next to you that if he will

allow my Spirit to increase his vision for ministry he won't have to spend the next twenty years simply holding on to what he already has."

Bob's immediate response was, "God, he'll think I'm crazy. I've not said 'boo' to him and he's not said 'boo' to me." Once again, the same insight came to him. After the third time, he prayed, "OK, God, I give up. You open the door and I'll speak the word."

Within seconds the piece of meat Bob was chewing became so tough that he couldn't swallow it. He turned to his neighbor and said, "This meat is tough."

The man smiled and said, "Yeah, I gave up on that meat myself."

Feeling somewhat encouraged, Bob asked, "Do you make an honest living?"

The man said, "You know, I don't."

Bob was so caught off guard that he blushed and asked, "Do we need to talk about that?"

The man said, "I saw you pray over your meal and I think we need to talk about that." Bob says he doesn't remember praying over the meal, but he's sure the man didn't make that up.

After they had talked for about fifteen minutes, Bob felt like he could share the insight he believed God had given him. So he told the man, "If you will allow my Spirit to increase your vision for ministry, you won't have to spend the next twenty years simply holding on to what you already have." The man started sobbing and couldn't speak. For several minutes Bob just held onto him, trying to console him, and thinking "Help me, God! What have I done?"

As the man began to recover, he told Bob this story: "I own a business in the Fortune 500. Just before you spoke to me I was about to make a decision that was better for profit than for people, and I asked God if God really cared, and if God really did care to show me. Within seconds, you spoke to me and we began to get acquainted. When you spoke the words you believed to be from God, I became so convicted that I had to confess, 'God, I'm sorry and I promise you this: I'm not going to be an oppressor of people anymore!'" They went on to talk more and when they landed, the

man told the whole story to the person who was picking Bob up at the airport (*Sanctity Without Starch* 160-61).

I like how that story shows the anointing and gifts of the Holy Spirit and how it connects to the kind of stuff Jesus made the priority of his ministry based on Scripture. And it's the kind of stuff he makes the priority of the church's ministry. And he gives the same Spirit to fill and anoint and empower us.

If you read on in Luke 4, you'll see that Jesus' hometown folks became enraged at what he said and they tried to kill him. And we see not only how Jesus' hometown church reacted to him, but we're challenged to consider our own response to Jesus. What do we make of his claims? How do we feel about the people he includes in his love and that he ministers to?

Do we welcome Jesus and join him in his mission, or do we try to shove him aside when he leads us and calls us to minister to people who aren't like us? A friend of mine once told about being with a group of church people who kept asking, "How do we get more people? How do we get new people?" Someone started describing how they would need to change. And they said, "Oh, we don't want to change!"

Are we willing to go with Jesus wherever he leads, whatever it may cost? This scene on the cliff outside Nazareth not only foreshadows Jesus' rejection and death; it also foreshadows the fate of many of his followers.

Hearing and receiving the good news includes the responsibility of sharing the good news—with everyone. That can get dangerous, or at least uncomfortable. We can do it only if we will go with Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today, Jesus is here. He comes to us as Prophet, Priest, and King. Today, Jesus offers good news and healing and freedom. Today, Jesus invites us to respond to him. Today, Jesus calls us to join him in his mission. Today, Jesus offers the power of the Holy Spirit so we can go with him in mission to all the people he loves.