

Luke 4: 14- 21

<sup>14-15</sup>Jesus returned to Galilee powerful in the Spirit. News that he was back spread through the countryside. He taught in their meeting places to everyone's acclaim and pleasure.

<sup>16-21</sup>He came to Nazareth where he had been reared. As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place. When he stood up to read, he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written,

God's Spirit is on me;  
he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor,  
Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and  
recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set the burdened and battered free,  
to announce, "This is God's year to act!"

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the place was on him, intent. Then he started in, "You've just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place."

### The Alpena Experience

This was the first recorded sermon of Jesus. It consisted of 1 ½ verses of an Old Testament and two sentences of preaching. Then he sat down.

There are perhaps some who would wish that would be a good pattern for sermons today.

When the folks in the synagogue heard this, we are told that they wanted to take hold of Jesus and throw him off a nearby cliff. I don't think it was because his sermon was too short.

Out of all the New Testament passages – this is the passage that very clearly describes the mission statement of Jesus. The bad news is that when people heard it – they didn't like it.

One of the tasks our denomination asks congregations to do – particularly after the retirement or resignation of a pastor – is to engage in a mission study – what is the mission of the congregation?

In many ways the process can be helpful as it forces people to think and rethink – to focus on the purpose of the congregation – to remember once again why we're here and what we're to be doing.

While there may be some value in setting aside time for study, reflection and the creation of a mission statement – I'm not sure any study group could do better than the 1 ½ verses that Jesus uses to describe his. Mission studies become term paper length reports and mission statements are prone to be more comforting and less challenging in order to more easily say that they are realistic and achievable. They run the danger of asking God to bless us the way we are, rather than make us into the people God needs us to be.

Today, however, as we begin year 126, we are confronted with the mission statement of Jesus that asks us to step outside our comfort zones and move with him into the future that God has in mind.

One of the important things to realize about this passage is the this is the scripture verse that *the members of Jesus' synagogue would be expecting to hear that read on that day. Like those who follow the lectionary today, they Jews had a traditional calendar for the readings of the Pentateuch, the wisdom books, and the prophets as well. The scripture lesson for the morning worship service would not surprise them. It was the one that was on the calendar. It was the one that they always heard on this particular Sabbath. It was the statement – the sermonette - that*

*Jesus made after the reading that would shock and surprise them: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

*The congregation certainly did not expect to hear those words on that Sabbath day!*

*Jesus CHOSE that scripture as his personal mission statement and the mission statement of all Christians who would dare to follow him.*

*(Jerry Goebel, OneFamily Outreach)*

I am here to tell you that today, this scripture is fulfilled. Listen:

God's Spirit is on US;

God has chosen US to be good news to the poor,

Sent US to announce pardon to anyone imprisoned (whether by physical barriers or by a culture of accumulation)

recovery of sight to those blinded (whether by the sweat or tears of hard labor or grief or by self centeredness and selfishness that obscures the needs of others)

To set the burdened and battered free,

to announce, "This is God's year to act!"

"You've just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place. Alpena, Michigan."

Did you know that in Hebrew, there is no distinction between the ideas of "Gospel or Good News" and the "preaching or sharing of it". To have an understanding of God also meant having a responsibility to share that understanding with others. But even more importantly it means more than talking about it – it includes the responsibility to demonstrate how that makes a difference in how we live. It's not simply a call to tell me but to show me.

In other words, we are not so much charged to preach the Gospel to those who don't have it as we are charged to be taken by the Gospel to be with people who need us. *Jesus isn't talking about who is coming to my church; he is talking going out to be his church.*

We don't have the Gospel – it has us – it's grabbed us. And it is our call to action.

Last night I heard Jim Arbuckle talk about some of the historical highlights of this congregation. I appreciate the history, but there was one statement that I think needs to be clarified. He mentioned that Stephen Wright was the only minister that has come out of this church. Now, I know Stephen and his gifts for ministry are many, and I don't want to diminish his work or calling – but I've got to say that it may be more accurate to say that he may be the only minister to come out of this church who is being paid.

I have seen ministry, I have experienced ministry and I can tell you that ministry is happening through the energy and efforts that so many of you make in so many ways.

Last Wednesday evening as we were coming back from the Highway clean up I passed by the a church where there were probably 30 teenagers out playing games on the lawn – and I had this fleeting thought – wouldn't it be nice to have that many teenagers in this church – but then I remembered that instead of playing games, Josh Trainer along with Allison and Heather Kane were

out picking up trash on the highway. And on Saturday night, we had Heather and Josh, Abby and Sara Musch, Elizabeth LeFave and Bret LeTourneau serving us and washing the dishes – that had to be an exciting Saturday night for them. I hope that you know that you are so important to this church – not as some segregated portion an other church might call “youth ministry” – but as a part of us.

I take a look across the street at the roofing project taking place. And I remember that when we had to do that we had 70 and 80 year old men on our old roof shoveling off the old rock. Or I think of how I have seen Chuck Allison do his struggling armadillo imitation laying on the floor as he installs a dishwasher in the kitchen.

I see Bill Allen coming back after work to mow the acreage on his own time.

I see Bob Kelly spending hours at Tendercare and all the Deacons quietly doing their job. There is Bill Walker sitting with a family in the ICU waiting room.

I see Sue Skibbe equally adept at creating beautiful centerpieces and paintings and packing Styrofoam in the back of her car to take recycling.

I consider the tasks accomplished by the Friendship Room teams as they consistently serve people who are hungry.

I see Ruth Dupuis, Hazel Trelfa and Marion Lamy Dave French and Christa Williams taking care of people at the Free Clinic.

I see Char Keune at Shelter, Inc being the good news to the battered, the bruised and the frightened victims of abuse.

I see people building houses for habitat, working with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

I see people with hip replacements assisting older people in and out of cars and driving them to where they want to go.

I see people not content to be retired and retiring, but actively engaged in the community and working for things greater than their own comfort.

I see ministry all over this place and in each of you as you recognize that people who need us are often only a shopping cart behind us.

Are the ones who work two jobs and still can't make a living.

Are those who are one accident or illness away from homelessness

Or those who have already slipped down into that pit out of which they can't see any possibility –

Until you are there to offer a helping hand, enough money to pay a utility bill, a word of encouragement, the gift of your presence and genuine caring.

Last night Jim also said that in 2004 you decided to call a “tentmaker” minister to serve as your pastor. In the church world we tentmaker ministers are also called bi-vocational ministers. Well, I'll tell you everyone in this room is bi-vocational. We are not designed to be a chapel for

members – we are built for service – and everyone has a part to play. Yes, we try hard to maintain the building, honoring the service of the past – but we are also willing to die to our self interest if it means serving the needs of others.

That is the Alpena Experience.

Today, this scripture has again come true.

To the extent that we are working to fulfill Christ's mission we can say this will be Good News to us.

We can't take on the name of Christian if we don't take on the mission of Jesus Christ – which must be our mission too –

To be the good news

To give sight to the blind,

Freedom to the oppressed.

Aid to the battered and burdened

These are earth shaking – life changing words that can get you thrown over a cliff.

In his first sermon, Jesus chose these words as the most important words in the whole Old Testament to him. During his whole life, Jesus reached out to the outcasts and untouchables of his world - the lepers, the blind, the lame and poor. He identified his mission and his ministry not by describing what we must believe about him or about God– but what we must do.

It's a pretty good way to start year 126.

Let us pray: Gracious God and Holy Friend, you challenge us to become your people not by our own strength, but by relying on you. Through the life of Jesus you show us the way and by the power of the Holy Spirit you set us on our way. Amen.

