



Apse Mosaic - Basilica of Cosmas and Damien - Rome, 527 AD

Greetings!

Please read [Luke 4:14-21](#)

Don't you wish you were there? The synagogue in Nazareth, that's where. The day Jesus was handed the Isaiah scroll, read a portion and then handed it back to the attendant *"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."* (vs.21)

Can't you just hear the inaudible gasp?



You can just see it. The whole family is there. A meal is planned afterward; extended family has come into town. The very proud parents are bursting at the seams. Jesus, his first time in the pulpit in his home synagogue, ends up in an uncomfortable place. It appears Jesus is making himself the subject in Isaiah's prophecy. That would not be well received. What was the look on the faces of the family? Do you think they felt the tension?

Jesus offers a dramatic moment for all in attendance! And not just for affect - but born out of the notion of knowing who He is.

The mission of Jesus' life and ministry is wrapped up in the text. Jesus is not claiming to be the subject of Isaiah's prophecy. There is no claim of Messiahship in this passage. Those in attendance that day may have wanted to accuse him of blasphemy or some such other complaint. In that difficult moment, the family probably left in silence.

A more careful hearing for those in attendance, and for us today, points to Jesus with a clear agenda at hand.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to*

*the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 4:18 - 19*

Jesus sounds dangerous, doesn't He? The Lords' favor. The oppressed go free. The recovery of sight. Release of captives. Good news to the poor. Anointing. The Spirit of the Lord resting upon Him. The mission is filled with unbelievable imagery! What is so engaging is that each image points to a current situation in the nation of Israel. At its most common level is that the thumb of Superpower Rome controls everything: commerce, military and education. Rome owns the legal system and uses capital punishment to terrorize the people under their authority. And, Rome controls the clergy. The clergy leadership is co-opted by handsome payoffs and prominent positions of authority. The Temple establishment may have been at the height of the social order, but they must have known that the respect shown them was conditional. The clergy were caught between the authorities on earth and the power of creation - the authority of Heaven. Caught in between a sacred call to serve the work of the religious life of a nation, to God, and the tension with a King/God Caesar, who is the leader of the polytheistic system built on brute force and power. This temporal power is in opposition to the power of the Universe found in humility, justice, grace, and in a baby born in Bethlehem.

So here is the new rabbi Jesus preaching his first sermon... only one sentence long. When this passage is read by Jesus in Nazareth at the beginning of his ministry you get the synopsis, the road map, the strategic plan of his life, right there in two short verse - such clarity and simplicity with such power! Jesus' choice of text for the sermon is built on legacy but reimagined for the present. He chose the wisdom and depth of a faith which includes the marginalized, not just the powerful.

**Let me close with a few questions for you:**

- Are you clear about your life's mission?
- If so, can you see how it is built on those who have lived before you?
- What wisdom or depth from those persons have you drawn upon?
- What wisdom and depth are you leaving for those who come after you?

**Prayer**

O God,  
you spoke your word  
and revealed your good news in Jesus, the Christ.  
Fill all creation with that word again,  
so that by proclaiming your joyful promises to all nations  
and singing of your glorious hope to all peoples,  
we may become one living body,  
your incarnate presence on the earth. Amen.

[\(Vanderbilt Library Lectionary\)](#)

Peace,



Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent  
Ohio River Valley District, United Methodist Church

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