

January 23, 2022
Rev. Kerry Smith

God is Calling, What Did Jesus Do?
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Luke 4:14-21

New Revised Standard Version

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“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.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

I love our graphic for this sermon series, it is a picture of an iPhone and looks as if God is calling. As Christians we share a belief that God calls all people into ministry and gives each person gifts for that ministry. My hope for these next few weeks as we talk about God calling us is that we will together discover how to listen for and respond to God who is calling us into the world to love and serve others.

Today we hear the story of Jesus responding to God’s call on his life. It is Jesus’ first public words. This is Jesus coming home saying to his friends and family, this is what I feel called to do in my life. At this point in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus had been baptized and received his call into ministry. He had survived the wilderness and forty days of temptation. He had already begun teaching and healing. And now he is going home to Nazareth, the small agricultural town where he grew up. He will be with adults who watched him grow up. People in Nazareth had heard stories about Jesus’ teaching and healing throughout Galilee. They had also heard what John the Baptist had proclaimed about Jesus before his baptism. John said that Jesus would baptize not only with water but with the fire of the Spirit; that Jesus was a man of power and good news for God’s people. When the hometown crowd learned he would be the speaker at the synagogue, they filled the room, waiting for him to arrive.

The portion of the Torah Jesus was given contained the prophet Isaiah’s words on social justice and liberation. As can happen whenever a preacher reads scripture out loud, Jesus began the work of interpretation as soon as he started speaking the words. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon *me* because God has appointed *me* to bring good news to the poor.” “We need that blessing,” a few of the widows might have said to each other. Jesus kept on. “The Lord has sent *me* to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind.” “Amen,” a few fellows may have responded from the back row. Jesus kept reading. “The Lord has sent *me* to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” “Glory Be!,” a woman may have said. The people were right with Jesus, hanging on his every word. So with their full attention, Jesus sits down and proclaims that in him those promises from God had been fulfilled, right then and there, that day. Jesus said, I am the promised one. God’s promises are fulfilled with him, in him, that very day. The congregation might have gone wild, clapping, and proclaiming, “Yes!” People said that nothing good could come out of Nazareth, well, now the people of Nazareth were going to get a piece of the action. They were going to get God’s blessing and power for themselves. They were ready for see God’s best work happen for them. They were ready.

After Jesus sat down he told that hometown crowd the stories of Elijah and Elisha, and the Amens and murmurs of praise quieted. The silence turned into anger because Elijah and Elisha saw their hometown people as just one group of many groups. Jesus is telling his

hometown crowd his work of healing and blessing would eventually touch their lives in Nazareth, but it wasn't going to start with them that day. The people who God was going to have Jesus bless first were people that hometown crowd didn't even like or approve of. Elijah had been sent to an outsider Gentile widow. Elisha had healed a Syrian commander who was considered a national enemy. Jesus was not going to let any historical or ethnic boundaries limit what God was doing through him.

When Jesus denied that hometown crowd their special status, Jesus went from favorite son to troublemaker fast, and then the crowd tried to push Jesus off a cliff. Can you imagine? His hometown crowd wanted to kill Jesus for what he was telling them about God!

Jesus is letting us know this is where I'm going, this is who I'm for. Jesus is oriented to the people who are marginalized. Jesus isn't excluding others from his ministry, he is letting us know who is going to benefit the most from his ministry. Jesus is sharing with the world his calling.

Jesus brings good news to outcasts - the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed. These are folks that we have been trained to feel sorry for as we pass them by at the street corner even as we give a prayer of thanks that their lot is not ours. These are folks that we may pity, but Jesus says he comes for them. God gives special attention to those whom the world doesn't want us to see. God is like that, focused on people and places that the world has overlooked, forgotten, or discarded. We think that some lives matter and some don't. We think that some places in our world are important and others aren't. Jesus proclaims here that those distinctions fade away in the face of grace because God sees all and loves all.

It makes me think of the parts of myself that I don't want seen. God sees those parts of me that I think are ugly and unlovable, and God loves me anyway. God doesn't wait for me to improve enough to be loved. God loves us enough to see us, God loves us enough to forgive us, God loves us enough to challenge us, and God loves us enough to send us out to see and love others, especially those the world does not see.

When God called Jesus, Jesus oriented himself to the marginalized. God has called you. Who do you orient yourself to? Way back in 2006, there was a shooting at an Amish one-room schoolhouse in Pennsylvania. Ten years later there was a story on Storycorps that I still remember hearing. The woman telling the story was the mother of the gunman whose name was Charlie. Five girls lost their lives and five were severely injured due to Charlie's violence. Charlie died by suicide, as well. For the Storycorps interview, the mother told two stories that happened to her family after that shooting. The first story was about Charlie's funeral. Given all the pain Charlie had done, she and her husband decided to hold a very private graveside service. But when they arrived at the graveside, they saw thirty to forty Amish parents, people whose children had been directly affected. Those parents stood around them, surrounding them in the shape of a crescent moon throughout the graveside service, radiating forgiveness and love to them. The mother said she could barely take in their kindness.

After some time had passed, Charlie's mother began to feel a deep need to be connected to the families her son had hurt. She felt drawn to help a little girl named Rosanna, one of the surviving children who had been the most severely injured. She called Rosanna's parents and shyly asked if she could come over once a week and give them rest by sitting with Rosanna and taking care of her. Surprisingly, the parents said yes. Every single week from when the story was told, ten years, the mother goes over to Rosanna's house to give her parents some time off. Since Rosanna is connected to tubes and unable to care for herself, Charlie's mother reads to her, combs her hair, and bathes her. Charlie's mother still finds herself amazed at the chance she has

been given to be in relationship with those her own son acted so violently against. “Their choice to allow life to move forward was a healing balm to us and a message the world needs,” she said, as the interview ended.¹ God has called us, each one of us. Who are we called to help?

¹ <https://storycorps.org/stories/terri-roberts-and-delores-hayford-160930/>