

Bring It to Proclaim It

Luke 4:14-21

January 27, 2019

I remember the first sermon I ever preached. It was at Ardmore Moravian Church and I was 14 years old. I had just started the 9th grade and we were having Youth Sunday on the Sunday before Thanksgiving. A few weeks before the day, my pastor, Craig Troutman, came to me and said that he needed two members of the Youth Fellowship to preach short sermons that day. And then he said something that would change my life forever, even though I didn't know it at the time. He said "I think you should be one of them." And so I did. I'm not sure it was something I would have ever volunteered to do, but I did it because Pastor Craig showed such faith in me.

Over the years, I preached a number of times at Ardmore. I did another Youth Sunday sermon during my Sr year of high school, a couple of occasions when I was in college, a few more times before I went off to seminary. But I especially remember the first time I preached a sermon at Ardmore after I had been ordained into the Moravian ministry, the first time I preached there as a "Real" preacher. The congregation invited me to come be the speaker for their Day of Prayer service during Lent. All of my family was there, all of the people from that congregation who had helped nourish and grow my faith. It was really exciting seeing my name in the bulletin listed as Rev. Joe Moore.

Actually I don't really remember what my sermon was about for that Day of Prayer service, but I do remember that EVERYONE loved it. I mean how could they not? After all, this was the little boy that they had watched grow up, that they had helped to become a pastor and preacher. Joey, the little boy that they had cared for in the nursery and taught in Sunday School, was now Pastor Joe, preaching the sermon. All eyes in the church were fixed on me.

Now I don't want to come across as being too cocky or full of myself. I'm actually pretty sure that my sermon for that Day of Prayer wasn't all that great. While I don't have a copy of it anymore, I have had occasion to revisit some of my older sermons, from over 20 years ago, and as I read them, I wonder how in the world I could have preached that. Like everyone, I have grown and changed over the years.

The reason that I am sure that everyone loved that Day of Prayer service sermon from 1999, is that they all had a personal investment in it, they all had a personal investment in me. They had known me my whole life and felt responsible for helping me become who God had called me to be. They had taken seriously the promise they made at my baptism to raise me in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord" and received me into the fellowship of the church. And now there I was, standing in the pulpit and sharing the Word of the Lord.

The people in the synagogue in Nazareth probably had similar feelings when they saw Jesus return home and share the words of the Hebrew scriptures. They had known him his whole life, they had nurtured and nourished his faith. They had helped him become who God had created him to be. And now there he was, teaching those who had taught him. "The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him."

Our Gospel reading is Luke's account of the first public actions of Jesus' ministry. Where John recorded what happened when Jesus and the disciples went to the wedding at Cana, Luke tells us about Jesus traveling around Galilee, teaching in the synagogues in each village. Like the wedding at Cana, where Jesus performed his first miraculous sign by changing water into wine, this occurs after Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan and the Holy Spirit descended upon him.

In Luke's gospel, immediately after he was baptized, Jesus goes into the wilderness where he was tempted for forty days. Then he returns to Galilee and begins

his public ministry. And he does so in a very public way as he goes from town to town, teaching in the Synagogue. He's a big hit. He was "praised by everyone." They loved what he was saying and teaching.

However Luke doesn't tell us any of the specifics about Jesus' teaching, at least until he gets to his hometown of Nazareth. There Jesus reads from the scroll that contains the prophecies of Isaiah. This is what he shares- *"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."*

In our Old Testament, we find this in Isaiah 61:1-2 *"The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* Notice that there are a few differences between the two. Primarily being that Jesus, in his teaching, includes the poor and bringing recovery of sight to the blind, and he leaves out the part about binding up the brokenhearted. But those differences are minor, fundamentally the words are the same.

They both include the recognition of the anointing by the Spirit and the Lord, bringing the Good News, and proclaiming release, liberty, and freedom. Both end with the proclamation of the "year of the Lord's favor." I imagine that the people who were there in the Nazareth synagogue that day knew this Scripture. They would have been familiar with the words that Jesus read. "All eyes were fixed on him" not because he had read or said anything new or earth shaking, but simply because he was Jesus.

Not the JESUS that we know, the Son of God and the Savior of the World. But because he was the Jesus that they knew, the son of Joseph and the little boy that they

had watched grow up. They were riveted by what he was saying not because of what he said but because of who he was. Just like when I preached my first real sermon at Ardmore Moravian.

Don't get me wrong. I am trying to be very careful about drawing too close a parallel between myself and Jesus. I am not Jesus, I am just one of his followers. But I do know what it is like to preach in your home and to wonder if people are actually listening to what you are saying or are simply happy to hear you because of who you are and the satisfaction they feel because they have helped you become who you are. Regardless, what Jesus said next was something that I don't know if I would ever say.

After reading the familiar words from Isaiah, Jesus sits down (which was what any teacher would do) and he says "Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Which is something that NO teacher would do. No one would claim to be the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Unless they either were delusion or they actually knew that they were.

And Jesus was not delusional. He knew that he was the fulfillment of the OT prophecies. He knew that the Spirit of the Lord had anointed him. He knew that he had good news to bring to the poor, that he would proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, that he would help the oppressed to go free. Jesus knew, even then, that he was the one who would bring about the year of the Lord's favor. He knew that he was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. So he went ahead and claimed it, right there before the people who knew him best, who had known him all of his life.

The reaction of his hometown people was interesting. But sadly that is next week's Scripture. For today, we are just going to stick with what Jesus said and why he said it and what it means to us. And that is plenty interesting in and of itself. For it sets

an example for us of what we have to do to share the Good News of Jesus with the world.

Even though we are not the fulfillment of the OT prophecies, even though we are not Jesus, we are called to do what Jesus did. We are called to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, we are called to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And we are not just called to proclaim it, but we are called to bring it. You have to bring it to proclaim it. We proclaim the Good News of Jesus more by what we do than by what we say, when we bring it to people in very real, tangible ways, then we proclaim it much more powerfully. It is what Jesus did himself and it is what we are called to do as well.

Everything that Jesus said that day in Nazareth was made a reality by his actions in his ministry that followed. He brought good news to the poor when he recognized that the poor widow, who only put two copper coins into the treasure, had actually put in more than anyone else; or when he said "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He proclaimed release to the captives when he told the criminal crucified next to him that he would be with him in paradise and when he told his disciples that they will know the truth and the truth will set them free. He brought recovery of sight to the blind when he literally healed a man who was born blind and when he brought light into the darkness. And Jesus let the oppressed go free when he died on the cross to free us, and to free all, from the burden of sin.

The Good News of Jesus is more than words- it is action. Things like releasing the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, and visiting the prisoner.

And like Jesus, we are “anointed” - in the waters of our baptism- and the Spirit of God is upon us to bring the Good News. But I’m not sure if we can say with the same confidence that he did that “this Scripture has been fulfilled.” Are we just preaching the Good News? Or are we living the Good News? Are we just proclaiming it without bringing it?

James points out the importance of doing both:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

James 2: 14-18, 26

We have to bring it to proclaim it. The Good News of Jesus is proclaimed by us through the actions of our lives and through the words of our mouths. We have to live out our faith- day by day. We have to love like Jesus, live like Jesus, and serve like Jesus. And what better place to do that than here.

New Philadelphia Moravian Church is the place to be. This is where we have a personal investment- in each other and in the work that we do together to bring and proclaim the Good News of Jesus. This is the place where we proclaim the Good News of Jesus as we bring it to the world. We do it as we live out our faith together- day by day. We act in the name of Jesus as we share bread with the hungry at places like Sunnyside and Crisis Control. We live with the Spirit of God upon us as we shelter the homeless poor through our work at City With Dwellings and Samaritan Inn. We fulfill the Scriptures as we welcome strangers, care for the sick, and visit those in prison. This is the place where we are called in to be strengthened, equipped, and encouraged to be sent out.

We are called in to be sent out. This is what the church is called to be- the place where believers gather together to be strengthened by our love for each other. It is the place where we come to be equipped by the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The church, THIS church, is the place where we come to live, to love, and to serve- like Jesus, for Jesus, and in Jesus' name.

So let us keep on bringing the Good News as we proclaim the Good News to each other and to the world. Then the Scripture will be fulfilled in our hearing and through our actions.