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Jesus' Keynote Address: Glad Tidings of Healing and Hope

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Jesus' keynote address invites us to appreciate ever more deeply both God's amazing love and our vocation to live as faithful disciples of Jesus.

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Jesus' Keynote Address

Glad Tidings of Healing and Hope

What better direction for our life and ministry can there be than Jesus' own keynote address! This marvelous and powerful scene in the gospel of Luke (4:14–21) is rich with statements about Jesus' identity and mission, and full of implications for our lives as disciples of Jesus. Let's take some time to pay attention to this passage, which presents the gospel in miniature.

Scripture scholars help us to appreciate Luke's creativity as artist and as theologian. Writing his gospel many years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Luke, of course, was not intending an exact historical account but rather a proclamation of faith. He wanted to share his community's experience and commitment and vision. So he felt free to rearrange his primary source, Mark's gospel, by moving this scene to the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Luke's creativity is also found within the text itself, as he weaves together selections from several different chapters of Isaiah and omits some other points. As it stands, this text would not be found on a synagogue scroll. Luke acts as artist in order to be preacher.

This passage is truly a keynote, establishing the basic themes of Luke's gospel. Jesus, the anointed one (the Messiah, the Christ), teaches and heals and proclaims the presence of God's reign. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises for the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned.

Indeed, Luke's gospel goes on to describe many examples of Jesus teaching and

healing the poor, including Peter's mother-in-law and a leper. Then, when some disciples of John the Baptist ask Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come," Jesus replies: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them" (Lk 7:20–23). God's reign is breaking into the world through Jesus.

And it continues to happen today—through us. As Luke was creative with Mark and Isaiah, let us be creative with Luke: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because the Spirit has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. The Spirit has sent us 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 . . . Today this scripture is being fulfilled in our hearing."

Amazing, isn't it? And absolutely true! We have been anointed by the Spirit in our baptism. We have been deeply loved by our gentle God, experiencing God's favor in so many ways. We have been sent out to proclaim glad tidings.

It is essential for us to remember and celebrate our identity, rooted in the life and teachings of Jesus. We want to hear again our call to follow him. We want to find renewed courage and wisdom in order to teach and to heal and to free. For that is what we do in our amazing variety of ministries and with our own families and friends and colleagues. And all this in very ordinary ways, with day-to-day details, sometimes with little recognition or appreciation from others.

Luke's text speaks of "the year of the Lord's favor," tapping into those special

feelings of the jubilee when people returned to their homes, debts were canceled, and slaves were set free. Even the structures of social and economic life must reflect God's reign. Still we need not wait for the extraordinary time. We live every day in a world of grace. The great theologian, Karl Rahner, has reminded us in one of his prayers of this important insight. Let's listen in: "Every day is 'everyday.' ... If it's true [O God] that I can lose You in everything, it must also be true that I can find You in everything. If You have given me no single place to which I can flee and be sure of finding You, ... then I must be able to find You in every place, in each and every thing I do. Otherwise I couldn't find You at all, and this cannot be, since I can't possibly exist without You. Thus, I must seek You in all things. If every day is 'everyday,' then every day is *Your* day, and every hour is the hour of Your grace" (*Prayers for a Lifetime*, pp. 92, 93)

Every year is a year of the Lord's favor. "Today this scripture is being fulfilled in our hearing."

Let's return to Luke's gospel and re-enter the scene of Jesus' keynote address. Almost immediately the scene turns sour as his own people drive Jesus out of town (Lk 4:21–30). And so Luke introduces other key themes of Jesus' life and ministry: conflict and rejection. The threat here is finally fulfilled in the crucifixion. Perhaps the mysterious "he passed through their midst" foreshadows the resurrection.

Along with the rejection by the people of Nazareth comes an essential Lucan theme: universalism. The good news is for all people, not just for Israel in need. By the time Luke's gospel was written, the story of Jesus had moved beyond the boundaries of Palestine. Indeed, Luke's community existed as a result of this move. We see even

more clearly in his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, that Luke emphasizes the spread of glad tidings to the whole world.

This more sobering part of Luke's keynote scene also speaks to us. As disciples of Jesus we too encounter conflict and rejection. We live in a culture and world marked by individualism, consumerism, and violence of all kinds. Jesus' message and example of healing and gentleness is so desperately needed and yet is consistently rejected by the powers of domination.

We know too that much conflict occurs within the Church itself. Suspicion between liberals and conservatives, bitterness, oppression of groups, suppression of ideas all too often infect the body of Christ. We too are rejected by our own people. So, Jesus' example of faithful ministry, whatever the threat, is especially important. And also, of course, the resurrection, which grounds our hope.

Relying on God's promise, we desire to share the good news with all the world, starting with our own communities. We desire to follow Jesus in crossing boundaries that separate people. Yet in all this we also acknowledge our own limits, even sinfulness. We too reject other members of our community. We too get trapped in sexism and racism and classism, and so build barriers between our sisters and brothers, other images of God. We need to turn to another scene in Luke's gospel (15:11–32), the story of the Prodigal Son, and to trust that the forgiving father rushes out to meet us in loving compassion.

Another section of Luke's gospel, the Sermon on the Plain (6:17–49), helps us appreciate even more the glad tidings we are sent out to proclaim. We hear the heart

of what we are to teach; we experience the healing we are to share; we glimpse the kind of life our freedom serves.

If we are honest, we probably have to admit that Jesus' vision surprises us. It just does not make sense. What makes sense is to make lots of money, to have security and power. Jesus says happy are the poor and the hungry. What makes sense is to create tougher laws and build more prisons. Jesus urges people to be merciful and to love their enemies. What makes sense is that we harbor anger and resentment towards a spouse or parent, a stranger or terrorist. Jesus teaches forgiveness and prayer for persecutors.

In so many ways in his life and teachings, Jesus surprises us, turning our expectations upside-down, helping us to appreciate the difference and newness of the reign of God. Still we get trapped in "what makes sense" according to our culture, to common sense, even to some religious custom.

So Jesus' keynote address gives us the opportunity to learn again the meaning of life, to glimpse the very core of God's loving design. It invites us to appreciate ever more deeply both God's amazing love and our vocation to live as faithful disciples of Jesus. It leads us to refocus our attention on who we are and what we do by contemplating the identity and mission of Jesus. With Jesus, we are called and anointed. With Jesus, we are sent out to teach, to heal, to free. With Jesus, we face conflict and rejection. With Jesus, we reach out to all with compassion, especially the economically, physically and socially poor. With Jesus, we proclaim with passion glad tidings of healing and hope.

(This article is taken from *Disciples: Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, published in 2018 by Lectio Publishing, LLC; available at <https://www.lectiopublishing.com>.)