



January 23, 2022

Sermon Series

Shining Forth: Seeing Jesus in a New Light

This Week's Big Idea

What If God Was One of Us?

Introduction: Today we encounter Jesus on the heels of his 40-day time of testing in the wilderness. He's back on familiar territory, going to church in his hometown. The reputation he's starting to acquire as a teacher and spiritual guide is going to be put to the test here, too. Can the people who know him best see him as a mouthpiece for God? Can they imagine what the Spirit of the Lord is up to right in their midst?

Luke 4:14-21 NRSV

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. ¹⁶When 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, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸"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, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰And 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. ²¹Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Bible Conversation

How do you think Jesus was feeling when he stood up to read in the Nazareth synagogue?

What's your first reaction to the words Jesus reads from Isaiah (v. 18-19) - is this good news, or not?

The Spirit is mentioned twice in this short passage - v. 14 and the citation in v. 18. What hints does that give you about how Luke sees God at work in the world - and what might that mean for us?

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Reflection by Pastor Shelley Cunningham

Reading this story brought up memories of the first (and only) time I preached in my home congregation. I was a senior in seminary. It was the Sunday after Christmas. As I stepped into the pulpit my stomach was doing flip-flops. I could see my parents beaming in the front row; behind them, people who'd shaped my idea of what it means to be the church - Sunday School teacher, the children's choir director, teens I'd chaperoned on mission trips. I wanted to impress them with my theological depth and preach the best sermon they had ever heard. (Spoiler alert: It was not.)

I wonder what was going through Jesus' head when he got up to read in the synagogue in Nazareth. Nerves, excitement, confidence? He was just beginning to live into his public identity as a teacher; perhaps he was just beginning to understand his identity as fulfillment of the promised Messiah as well. He was going to have to reconcile the expectations people had for him with the expectations he had for himself, and figure out what it meant to be guided by the Spirit.

We don't know if Jesus chose that particular passage from Isaiah, or if it was chosen for him (because it would have been the expected reading for that day), but we do know that the words he shares have a different meaning coming from his lips. The picture of a world-turned-upside-down, a world where God is doing unexpected things, is the fulfillment of the song Jesus' mother sang as she awaited his birth. It is the theme Luke returns to again and again in his Gospel: the Spirit is up to something here, and Jesus is going to make it happen.

On some level, each of us as followers of Jesus are figuring out what it means to be guided by the Spirit, too; So, how do you feel, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon you," these days? And what cues might you take from Jesus about how you should respond?

Reflection Conversation

What feelings, observations, or experiences have you had when you've returned to your hometown?

What sometimes keeps us from speaking out boldly? And what compels us to do so?

The 1 Question:

How do you feel, "the Spirit of the Lord is upon you," these days?

Closing Prayer

Itinerant Spirit, you blow through our world, stirring up dreams and visions, calling us to take risks and be brave for the sake of the Gospel. It can be exciting and a bit unnerving to think that you are at work in us. Make us open to your Word. Give us courage to speak out. Guide us as you guided Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Next Week's Bible Theme and Text:

Sermon Series: Shining Forth: Seeing Jesus in a New Light

Sermon: Who Said Anything About Safe?

Text: Luke 4:21-30

1 week.
1 story.
1 message.

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