

“Seeing People Through Christ’s Eyes”

Luke 4: 14-21

September 30, 2007

As you have already heard a few times, this morning’s Faith in Action focus word (no pun intended) is lens. I’d like to begin this morning by having a little bit of fun. Look around you and notice how many of the people here today are wearing glasses. OK, here’s what I want you to do. VERY carefully and cautiously, if you are wearing glasses, I want you to take them off, and give them to the person sitting next to you. If they are also wearing specs, trade, if not, encourage them to try your glasses while you look around without them. Weird, eh? Have you ever thought about how very much the lenses through which we look at the world around us effect what we see?

But you know, in addition to the corrective lenses that we might wear, we all have spiritual lenses through which we view the world as well. We all have a “lens”—assumptions, responses, and judgments that influences how we see the world and other people. Jesus had his own unique way of viewing people as well, and it our challenge as Christians to do our very best to see the world through Jesus’ eyes, Jesus lenses, if you will. And so as a way of gaining some insight into the way that Jesus sees the world, we turn our attention to this morning’s passage from Luke’s gospel, and Jesus’ homecoming sermon.

Now let’s look at what scripture says about how Jesus sees people.

Unrolling the scroll that was handed to him, Jesus found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”* ²⁰ *Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Let me set the scene for you.

Jesus had returned to his hometown—the town he grew up in. It's the Sabbath day, Saturday—probably in the morning. He goes to the synagogue—which is what Jesus has been doing in other towns.

The synagogue is filled with people. The men and their sons are sitting on backless benches, and in the balcony are the wives, daughters and sisters. In the front of the room are a row of elders. One of them, the attendant, gets up. He speaks briefly. He then asks Yeshua Ben Yusef, Jesus the son of Joseph, to read the scriptures.

Jesus gets up and walks to the middle of the room where there is a raised desk—kind of like a podium. People are excited to hear from him because all sorts of amazing stories have been circulating about this hometown boy. Then the attendant carries a heavy scroll to the podium and hands it to Jesus. It's a scroll containing the writings of the prophet Isaiah.

Jesus unrolls the large scroll until he finds the passage that has been prescribed for this Sabbath. There are no chapter or verse divisions, but he comes to the passage that we call Isaiah 61:1–2. And then he begins to read in a way that sounds different than the rest—he reads in a way that sounds like a self proclamation. He speaks the first line ...

“I The Spirit of the Lord is on me ... ”

When he says this, it doesn't sound like he is just reading something that was written hundreds of years ago. It sounds like he is identifying with it. In fact, look back at verse 14. It says, “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.” The Spirit of the Lord is on him.

“because ..., ” Jesus continues reading the old words with new meaning. “ ... he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Jesus rolls up the scroll—hands it to the attendant—then sits down. Everyone is staring at Him—their eyes are glued. You can hear a pin drop. He breaks the silence with these words, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

That was a slam-dunk statement. When Jesus said that, it set people buzzing. Because they knew that this passage applied to the Messiah!

Jesus was saying that he was the one Isaiah was writing about. He was the Messiah, and that this passage was his mission statement.

What was the Messiah's mission? Listen carefully, take notes even, because this is our mission too.

1. Jesus' mission was to preach good news to the poor. People thought that being rich was a sign of God's favor and being poor was a sign of God's judgment. Jesus said—absolutely not. Jesus turned the tables and gave the poor good news; they were favored by God. Have you felt out of favor with God? Jesus has good news for you.
2. Jesus' mission was to proclaim freedom for the prisoner. Whether you are literally imprisoned or imprisoned spiritually, Jesus has come to set you free.
3. Jesus' mission was to give sight to the blind. The blind were thought to be blind because of some sin they had committed (or their parents committed). The religious leaders figured they deserved to be blind. Jesus came to heal and show mercy to people who were physically handicapped and spiritually condemned.
4. Jesus' mission was to release the oppressed. Jesus came to set wrongs right. He came to help the helpless. He came to bring justice to those who experienced injustice.
5. Jesus' mission was to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. This is a reference to the Old Testament year of Jubilee when slaves were freed and all debts cleared. Jesus came to proclaim that if you are enslaved by and in debt to sin, that you are free and all debts are paid, because of what he would do on the cross.

Jesus' mission was a people-focused mission. It was an outward-focused mission. It was a mercy and compassion-driven mission.

Jesus' mission was the secret to his vision. His mission guided his vision. His mission was the lens that made him see people the way he saw them. People were Jesus mission. His lens was compassion.

What we believe about our mission in the world affects how we see the world. When looking at your world, what do you see? A world in need? A world worth saving? A world worth serving? You will if you are looking at it from Jesus' point of view, through the lens of Christ. When you see people, ask the kind of question Jesus would ask. *"How can I help you?" "How can I show you God's love?" "How can I make you life better, happier, or a brighter place?"*

I look out at your faces this morning and I am reminded in a powerful way of the many gifts that are present in this congregation, and of the many places where we can serve Christ by serving others, and also cultivate our gift of compassion. How might you look on through the lenses of compassion this morning? What might you do in response? I encourage you to befriend the divorced, or serve at a safe house or be a listening ear to someone facing a difficult life decision. Sponsor a child, serve as a foster parent, or adopt hard-to-place babies. Comfort the dying through hospice, or minister at the prisons.

Ask God to remove your lenses of limited responsibility and fear of action, and replace them with the lenses of compassion. Ask God to help you see others the way Christ did. Ask the Spirit to allow Jesus' mission to guide your vision. If you can see people through the lens of Christ's compassion, you will discover practical ways to show them the love of Christ. Here's the church, here's the steeple, open the doors and see all the people through the eyes of Christ.

Amen.