

As The Father Sent Me

Two weeks ago on Pentecost Sunday I shared this thought with you, that Pentecost was about spiritual empowerment for the mission God has given us. Jesus commissioned us to go into all the world and proclaim the gospel, the good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. This morning I want to talk a bit about that mission and the message.

Immediately after the resurrection, in John 20, Jesus appears to his disciples behind locked doors and says to them, **“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” John 20:21-22.** “As the Father has sent me I am sending you.” What does that mean? There are so many things we can say about that but Jesus gives us a pretty clear idea at the beginning of his public ministry.

Luke tells us early in his public ministry **“Jesus went to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.’”** Jesus read this Scripture from the prophet Isaiah, a passage they associated with the coming of the Messiah. When he finished reading, **“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, and he began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” Luke 4:16-21**

Jesus was telling them, “It’s happening before your very eyes. I am the Messiah and I have come to preach good news. I’ve come to save, to mend and heal, to restore and set free.” This is the good news Jesus preached everywhere. And Jesus tells us “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” He wants us to proclaim and live out this good news. This is the message and the mission for which Pentecost empowers us. Jesus has anointed us and is sending us out to proclaim his good news, so let’s explore the mission and the message a bit this morning.

Turn to Isaiah 61. This is the passage Jesus read that day in the synagogue. The translation Luke shares with us is abbreviated in his gospel but the folks in the synagogue that day knew this passage in its entirety from Isaiah 61. Jesus read, **“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release**

from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” Isaiah 61:1-3

Our mission and message is here and it is good news! This is what he has anointed us for, this is the message we are to share. **The Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.** Both the financially poor and the spiritually poor were to benefit from Jesus' ministry. The spiritually poor are those who recognize our spiritual bankruptcy. We have no resources by which to save ourselves and we simply humble ourselves and receive his salvation. You can't buy his salvation, it is a free gift to all who will turn to him in faith and believe – that's good news.

Jesus came preaching good news to folks that seldom got good news – the poor. The poor are often ignored and overlooked by others in our society. In Jesus' day, the poor were more than ignored, they were despised. Consider this. The leadership elite in Jesus' culture were the Pharisees, the fundamentalists of the day. The Sadducees were the liberals of his day, the Zealots were the radical activists and the Essenes were the spiritually radical group that were living in a compound out in the desert! These groups added together were about 10% of the population. The 90% were the poor, the common folks just trying to make a living under Roman rule.

They were despised by the Pharisees and Sadducees because they felt the poor were poor because God was displeased with them. They were poor because they deserved to be poor. This also meant the Pharisees and Sadducees were affluent because God was pleased with them – they deserved to be rich and powerful. The Zealots despised the poor because they wouldn't take up arms to fight the Romans, the Essenes considered the poor unholy and unwilling to live a separated life so the poor had no one in their corner. They didn't get good news from anyone – and then came Jesus! He told them, “You without money, without power or influence, come. This gospel of the kingdom is for you! God loves you and His grace is available for you.” Jesus loved them and preached to them, he fed them when they were hungry, he healed their sick, he defended them by pointing out the hypocrisy of the wealthy elite. And he passes that concern for the poor to us as well. “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

We must be concerned for the poor among us. Our neighbors here in our community and our city and around the world. Our mission includes helping and serving those in poverty. For both the financially and the spiritually poor, there is good news – God loves you. He won't forsake you and God's people won't forsake you. We won't ignore your situation. God loves you, whether you are on top of the hill or at the bottom of the heap and he has sent us to proclaim that good news in word and in deed! Give, volunteer, pray, go, serve. Volunteer to help Habitat for Humanity with a build or help at John 3:16 or look for ways to bless folks around you. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." It's our mission and our message.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted. Life has a way of breaking hearts, doesn't it? Afflictions, disappointments, losses, shattered dreams, promises broken that leave us wondering, what now? Hopeless, feeling like we can't go on. The broken hearted can't imagine a future, but Jesus comes to bind up the broken hearted. He has come to restore, to put the pieces back together, to do what no other can do. Jesus makes a way where there is no way. He provides a destiny and a purpose that you thought had been forever lost, or at least damaged beyond repair. Jesus says to the broken hearted, "you will discover a greater purpose and a new reason to go on. Trust me!" That's the power of his grace at work in broken hearts and lives.

And Jesus sends us to the brokenhearted. To the betrayed, the grieving, those who have been cheated and battered and torn apart by the unfairness of life, he sends us with his good news: "Jesus loves you. He wants to heal your brokenness. Feel his arms about you. Sense his gentle, loving hands as he reshapes and mends your broken heart. There is grace enough for you."

There are broken hearts and broken lives everywhere. It's overwhelming and we can't fix everything and everyone, but start where you are. Start by noticing and caring about others. Who are the broken hearted around you? Acknowledge that you have a mission and a message and then take a first step and reach out in love. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the captives. Captive. Just the sound of it makes me think of a tiny room, walls closing in, hard to breathe, trapped without a way of escape. Few of us have been captive in a literal prison but many of us know what it means to be a captive. We've been held in bondage by some kind of addiction, imprisoned by depression, anxiety, or incapacitated by illness. Trapped and wishing we could be free; wishing we could be

the person we've always wanted to be. Perhaps we are trapped inside walls we've built ourselves. Walls of defense and protection. "I'll never let anyone hurt me that way again. I'll never get that close to anyone again," and the end result is we have become captives inside ourselves, walled off from love and friendship and kindness, walled off from his love and grace.

Jesus has come to proclaim freedom for all of us. You don't have to live inside that prison any longer. He brings freedom for captives of all kind. You don't have to live in bondage to sin, to lust and pornography, to alcohol and drugs, to gambling, to guilt and shame and self-condemnation. He has come to set the captive free! Call upon him. Turn to him. Obey him.

And church, we are sent to the captive. The good news of freedom isn't coming from anywhere else. The world says, "once an addict, always an addict" but Jesus says, "whom the Son sets free is free indeed!" The world doesn't offer hope, but Jesus has come to give us life, and salvation, and freedom and hope for the captives. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Let's walk in freedom ourselves and share that freedom with others!

He has sent me to proclaim release from darkness for the prisoners. Darkness. All kinds of people are prisoners in darkness. Without understanding, groping for answers but they can't find their way. There is only one way out of the darkness. The bible says, **"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." 2 Corinthians 4:6**

People spend their lives cursing the darkness around them, but Jesus gives us an invitation to come to him and when we do, we step out of the darkness and into his light! Look into the face of Christ, accept his forgiveness and grace and His light will shine into the darkness of your heart and life.

Everywhere Jesus went his light shined in the darkness. He hasn't sent us to try to blind people with his light, trying to expose their evil deeds in the darkness, but to shine that light so they can find their way to Jesus and his grace. Jesus said, **"Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16.** Let your light shine before men. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

He has sent me to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Favor. Does that word ring a bell? Favor, like unmerited favor. Grace! God wants you to know his mercy, his forgiveness, his favor. The gospel is good news. Sadly at times the gospel has been preached like God hates

everyone and is glad to send sinners to hell. Jesus said, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:16-17.** He doesn’t want anyone to perish. He wants you to experience his forgiveness, his mercy, his favor but he won’t force you to be saved. He has provided the means for your salvation at an unspeakable cost but the choice is up to you. Understand, God doesn’t excuse our sins, but he will forgive our sins. Ask him to forgive you and experience his favor.

I’ve known so many Christians who have gone through life still believing that God was against them, looking for every opportunity to withdraw his salvation. Jesus came to proclaim the Lord’s favor to all who will hear and believe. Hear it, receive it and then proclaim the good news! **He has sent me to proclaim the day of vengeance of our God.** Jesus came to let folks know a day was coming when God would settle accounts. “I knew it was too good to be true. Now we’re gonna get it. Now we get to the part where God starts condemning us.” Listen, God’s favor and his vengeance are linked together. Who is God’s vengeance reserved for? If you have repented of your sins and made Jesus Christ the Savior and Lord of your life, you have no cause to fear or dread God’s vengeance. Your account has been settled. His vengeance is not visited on his children whom he has redeemed, but upon sin and Satan and all the havoc the devil has caused. Think about this. Every delivered addict, every prisoner set free, every heart mended is an act of vengeance against Satan. Through Christ, God has triumphed over the enemy of our souls. Jesus rose again, and the bible says when he did he made a public spectacle of the power of Satan. The day of God’s vengeance is a day when Satan’s house is plundered and destroyed, when wrongs are righted, when justice prevails, when the oppressed are relieved of their burdens and the oppressors are disarmed and judged. The day of vengeance of our God is the day when all of God’s enemies, including death itself, are forever defeated. It is a day of victory realized! Think of the resurrection. God takes his vengeance upon death itself and we shout “Death has been swallowed up in victory! Death where is your victory? Grave where is your sting?” (1Cor. 15:54-55.)

We’ve got good news to proclaim. God will take his vengeance on Satan, and sickness and death and heartbreak will be forever banished and on that day he will wipe all the tears from

our eyes! There are better days ahead. Believe it. Proclaim it!

He has sent me to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve. Jesus cares about all the losses of our life. We saw it as he raised the widow's son and Jairus' daughter, as he comforted those who mourned and calmed the storms of life for so many. Jesus cares about the losses of your life – death, separation, divorce, disappointment. He knows and he provides for you. He is described as the God of all comfort, a very present help in a time of trouble, near to the broken hearted and the broken in spirit. He is the God who comforts the depressed, who lifts up the countenance of those who are discouraged and cast down in their soul.

And he calls his church to be comforters as well. I don't mean giving little pep talks to people that are grieving, but coming along side to stand with the grieving, to encourage, to pray, to remind them they are not alone. We are talking about practical comfort. The Jews of Jesus day would sit *shiva* with someone who lost a loved one. They would spend a week with them, not talking, but sitting, preparing food, cleaning their house, caring for them as they grieved, letting them know they were not alone. God through his people is with them. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" to comfort and provide for those who grieve in the losses of life.

He has sent me to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. The good news of the gospel is transforming. It turns the world, every person's world, upside down, or actually right side up. It is His right standing in exchange for our sinfulness. It is His light in place of our darkness. It is a crown of beauty instead of the ashes that we throw onto our head in grief and hopelessness. It is oil that anoints and gladdens our head instead of the disheveled look of mourning. During the seven days of *shiva*, the Jewish mourner didn't wash or comb his hair or wash his clothes. Because of sin we lost our relationship with God and we live like folks in perpetual grief over our loss, but Jesus comes to tell us our reason for grief is over. He has restored our relationship and forgiven our transgressions, the ashes are gone and we've been resurrected to walk in a new life. The oil of joy is poured on us. We have reason to get up and move on, reason to rejoice in the victory of Christ. He has given us the garment of praise instead of that heavy blanket of despair that we wore. Psalm 3 says, **"But you are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head."** Psalm 3:3. The whole idea is of our

heads dropped down in grief, in despair, ready to give up. And God pours his glory, his presence on us and lifts up our head. No longer cast down or in despair, but we have a reason to rejoice. Our sins are forgiven, his life is at work in us, we are filled with his purpose, touched by his glory, resurrected with him, seated in heavenly places in Christ and we have an eternal future ahead! That is the good news of the gospel. That is the message we have received and that is the message we are sent to proclaim. This is the kingdom. This is his anointing. This is what the church is sent to proclaim and to do.

Imagine what it must have been like to sit in the synagogue that day and hear Jesus read those words. "If only the Messiah would come today, the anointed One. If only he would come because I'm poor and I need some good news. I'm a captive, living in darkness in my own heart. I'm dying without comfort, grieving without hope. If only the Messiah would come."

And then we hear him say, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Today, everything changes. Today. He has come, anointed for just the right reason and purpose, at just the right time, to save you and change you. He is what you need today and he offers grace and mercy, pardon and peace.

Some of you are hurting. He has come to bind up your broken heart. Some of you are grieving. He is the God of all comfort for you. Some of you need forgiveness. This is the day of the Lord's favor, his grace is available and it is sufficient for you. If you need to receive this good news today, to be saved or set free or a broken heart mended, I want you to come to him today.

This is the message and the mission. This is the good news for us to receive and the good news for us to share. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us for this cause, this mission, this message. Let's be faithful proclaimers of this good news!