

Luke 4:14-17

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

When Jesus was born, there was no widespread threat to him. The only threat came from King Herod. Otherwise, he was praised and worshiped by those that knew about him. When he was a child and he stayed behind at the temple in Jerusalem, he was praised by others including the religious leaders. They were amazed at his discerning wisdom. Now, early in the ministry of Jesus, he was preaching and teaching in the synagogues and he was praised by everyone.

The synagogue is a very important thing. It is a supreme contribution to the nation of Israel. Old Testament worship took place at various high places. Then King David laid out the plans for the temple, his son King Solomon oversaw the construction, and a magnificent temple was built in Jerusalem. However, due to the Exile, people scattered throughout the world and the temple was destroyed. As a consequence, the people were concerned with where they could continue to worship. The local synagogue became the place for prayer, praise, study, and community fellowship. Christian worship was built upon the foundation of the synagogue. Going to church is very important because we go to worship for prayer, praise, study of the scriptures, and community fellowship. However, the most important reason to go to church is that we follow the divine example. Christians follow Jesus. We follow his word and we mimic his life. Jesus practiced going to the synagogue. Therefore, we are to follow the practice of Jesus by going to church. The question for the complacent, who are of the opinion that public worship is of no importance, is to think about their position from the judgment seat of Jesus and consider if their opinions will be met with agreement or rebuke.

Jesus was filled with the power of the Spirit. Think about what it means - the power of the Spirit. What he did was to give a description of the ministry that he himself would fulfill and as a consequence, the ministry that we are to fulfill. The scene provides a keynote to his entire ministry which is done with the power of God - the power of the Holy Spirit. The only weapon Jesus uses to change the world is love. Jesus embarks upon his ministry teaching in synagogues. It is important for us to remember and understand that Jesus made a regular practice of going to the synagogue and teaching lessons for the people. We are to bring good news to the poor. We are to be advocates of liberty for the oppressed. We are to recover sight to the blind. I need to explain this because it has an ambiguous meaning. We know that giving sight to the blind is physical. Jesus physically

healed the blind to allow them to be able to see. Giving sight to the blind is also prophetic fulfillment of God's promise to Israel, fulfilling God's work of salvation as foreseen by the prophet Isaiah. Giving sight to blind is also theological. What Jesus really gives sight to are the spiritual undiscerning, those who do not recognize the reality of God.

Today's Scripture is the proclamation of Jesus that he is the fulfillment of prophetic scriptures, the hopes of Israel, and the promise of God. Jesus announcement indicates that centuries of waiting on God's blessing have ended. Jesus sets us free from the bondage of sin. Jesus sets us free from the slavery of desire. Jesus sets us free from moral depravation. Jesus sets us free from the seduction of the flesh. Jesus sets us free from the entrapment of materialism. Jesus presents himself as the fulfillment of prophecy. He is the Spirit filled prophetic figure. In other words he is saying "I am the Messiah." It is from this point forward that Jesus is confronted with opposition.

The contemporary lesson for us is to understand our role in our relationship with the divine. When the people of Israel reject Jesus they also reject the proclamation of the gospel. Our theology is Jesus centered. It is human teaching and human preferences that divide us. We focus on Jesus and that unites us instead of opinions that divide us. Within the realm of contemporary society there are many different attitudes to the Christian faith and religion. Christianity has splintered and morphed over centuries and each occurrence is catered to human opinions. The church that Jesus established is united in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not lead us to do our own thing; the Holy Spirit leads us to be united in Christ, united in Spirit, and united in the persona of Christ. The Holy Spirit unites us and human preferences divide us. People believe what they want to believe and people do what they want to do. This is the original sin - the will of God ignored and rejected by human desire. The power of the Holy Spirit will bring us all together. We have pinpointed concentration - Jesus centered theology - but there is a terrible rebuke for those who do not. Jesus is the light for the world. As such we are to be light for others. What we can give sight to is the world around us that does not know Jesus.