

Luke 4:14-21
24 Jan. 10

”Why Are We Here?”

What’s the number one job of a leader? Some business consultants say that a CEO’s *only* important job is repeatedly reminding the employees, the stockholders, and the public of the corporation’s primary purpose, why it’s here.

Here at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus lays out before us what he is here for: “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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” Jesus says he is Spirit empowered and led and that he has come to proclaim good news to the poor, release to the captive, and the Lord’s favor. These themes reoccur constantly in Luke’s Gospel.

And they’re worth repeating again today. Because the message we usually hear and the results we usually see is good news to the rich and just more captivity to the captive. And the message we often hear is not one of the Lord’s favor. Instead we either hear a message that says, “You don’t measure up to the lord’s standards,” or that the Lord is indifferent to you. Headlines from just this past week make this all too obvious.

Good news to the rich. When I lived in ghetto St. Louis my congressman William Clay once said something like this: “I’m working for the poor. I’m not against the rich; it’s just that they can take care of themselves, and the poor have neither the power nor the money to do so.” Case in point, bankers. Bankers are easy to pick on, and just about everybody left an right is doing so these days. There’s a populist uprising against them, and not without reason. They play risky games of buy and sell, and when that works, they get huge bonuses on top of their huge salaries. And

when it doesn’t work, they get bailed out by taxpayers and still get large bonuses.

Meanwhile the captive just get more captivity. If you’re unlucky enough to be born in Haiti, it’s likely that you’ll be captive to ignorance, poor education, and bad, ineffectual government. Which means a completely unregulated market, which among other things means no building regulations. And that means when there’s an earthquake, buildings collapse killing thousands upon thousands.

That’s the message we usually get—good news to the rich and captivity to the captive. By contrast, Jesus’ message is good news to the *poor* and *release* to the captive. Jesus practiced exactly that in his ministry, welcoming the poor, the leper, the unclean, and the outcast as well as the rich with whom he seems to have dined regularly. teaching about a God who does the same; healing those held captive to diseases and possessions; and on his cross bringing release to those held in the captivity of death. That’s what he was here for. That’s why he came.

What are *we* here for? What are we here for at Living Water Lutheran Church? It would be easy for us to get confused because for a small church there’s an awful lot going on. There are many activities and necessary side purposes that draw our attention and energy. There is worship, which is pretty central; there’s fellowship, fun stuff; fund raisers; Bible studies, a massive service project in the food pantry and thrift shop; etc., etc. Add it all up and you’ve got so many trees that it’s hard to see the forest.

So what are we here for? What is our *number one* purpose? What is it that we dare not lose sight of if we are to be faithful to our lord and faithful to our calling? As disciples, as followers of Jesus, we are here to do what he did and what he commanded. And as I read it, Jesus gave us two commandments: that we love one another and that we make disciples. Love one another and make disciples. All that we do is—or at least should be—in service to those commissions. Our loving of one another and our reaching out to

make disciples should both proclaim and effect good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, release to the oppressed, all because of the Lord's favor. Our building of relationships and our living out of them should build faith that makes disciples and creates love.

There are a thousand ways to say it and ten thousand ways to do it, but to use a cliché, at the end of the day, we've got two commands, two commissions to fulfill: love one another and make disciples. If we're doing that, no matter how large or small we are, we are being faithful. And if we're not doing that, no matter what our programming, our size, or whether or not we have our own building, we are not being faithful. If our worship, our education, our fellowship, and our service, etc. are helping us love one another and make disciples, they are serving their purpose. And if our worship, education, fellowship, and serving, etc. are not helping us grow in love and are not making disciples, then they have lost their way.

I'm not particularly good at coming up with short, catchy, memorable phrases. But I can borrow from others. And one good, memorable, right-on purpose statement I have heard goes something like this: We are here to Know, to Grow, and to Go.

We are here to know: the Gospel message of God's love; God's purpose for our lives; and most importantly to know God. We are here to grow: in knowledge, service, love; most importantly to grow more Christ like. Full devotion to Christ is normal for those who bear his name. And we are here to go: on a Spirit empowered and Spirit led mission, proclaiming good news to the poor, release to the captive, and the Lord's favor and making disciples as we ourselves continue to grow as disciples.

Today there is a fulfillment. There is power in this Word and in the hearing of it. There is power in the receiving, and in the doing of it. There is power in the receiving of this Word in the visible forms of water, bread, and wine. Through its power we come to *know* God

more fully. Through its power we *grow* more Christ like. And in its power we *go* in mission, proclaiming and effecting good news to the poor and release to the captive.