

## **Sermon for January 24, 2016**

In today's Gospel reading we hear the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Luke. It's important to see what each Gospel writer sets as the beginning of Jesus' ministry because it sets the tone and theme for each Gospel. Last week we would have heard the beginning of Jesus' ministry in John. John has Jesus begin his ministry with the miracle at the wedding at Cana where water is changed into wine.

This is important to John because it helps to show what John meant by saying in his prologue that we have received from Jesus grace upon grace. God's grace is shown to us in the abundance of changing water into about 1,000 bottles of the best wine.

Luke begins Jesus' ministry with Jesus teaching in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. Jesus is handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah where he reads the following. "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." We can call this Jesus' mission statement. This is what Luke says is Jesus' mission to God's world.

As we read through Luke we can see where these themes are addressed by Jesus. Even before Jesus is born the theme of bringing good news to the poor is stated in Mary's Magnificat where she says, "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." Jesus himself lifts up the poor in the

beatitudes when he says, “Blessed are you who are poor; for yours is the kingdom of God.” Jesus says, “I have been anointed to preach good news to the poor.”

Jesus brings release to those who are held captive by disease and demons when he heals Pete’s mother-in-law, the man with the withered hand, those who are paralyzed, those with leprosy, and those who are possessed by demons. Fevers are rebuked and disappear. Withered hands are made whole. Demons are dispersed into swine and throw themselves into the sea. Skin ravaged by leprosy turns smooth and clean. The paralyzed are told to pick up their bed, stand and walk home. Jesus says, “I have come to bring release to the captives.”

Jesus brings sight to the blind. Jesus heals the blind beggar near Jericho when the blind man cries out for mercy, even though those around him are telling him to be quiet. The man shouts all the louder and Jesus has him brought to him. When the blind man tells Jesus that he would like to see again; Jesus speaks and immediately the man receives his sight. Jesus says, “I have come to bring sight to the blind.”

Jesus has come to let the oppressed go free. All of us are oppressed by sin and death. Jesus sets us free by overcoming sin and death. He forgives sins and sets people free from what was binding them—illness, demons, fear, revenge, judgment and hate. He can do this because he has power over even death itself. He shows this power when he heals Jairus’ daughter and releases her from death. He shows it when he releases the widow of Nain’s son from the grips of death. And finally he releases all of us from the power of sin and death when he

is crucified and raised from the dead for all of us. Jesus says, “I have come to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”

We here at Calvary also have a mission statement. It says, “We worship and proclaim Jesus Christ as our Savior to show Christ’s love to our neighbors near and far.” How are we fulfilling our mission statement? Some may feel that being here at worship is all we have to do, but worship is just the beginning of our mission statement. Worship is followed by actions—proclamation and showing.

While many of us aren’t comfortable with verbally proclaiming Jesus as our Savior; as a congregation you are very good at showing Christ’s love not only to our neighbors in and near the church, but also to those who are oceans away.

Calvary takes meals to those who are ill or injured, drives others to the doctor or to the grocery store or to church. Calvary collects food and money for ECHO, Loaves and Fishes, Crossroads Campus Ministry food pantry and helps out at the Loaves and Fishes food shelf in Mapleton. Calvary visits those who are sick or in nursing homes and remembers them with cards and phone calls. Calvary also helps others to stay in their homes by helping them to take care of it—such as giving the house a paint job. We help spread the Word of God by supporting the Southeastern Synod of Minnesota, Green Lake Bible Camp and Crossroads Campus Ministry at MSU.

But Calvary has also helped those who are far away from us. We have raised money for chicks and baby pigs so others can get out of the oppression caused by poverty. We have raised money for those who are starving by going hungry for

30 hours. We have raised money for eye doctors in South East Asia, medical missionaries in Colombia, and for the Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

We have another opportunity to fulfill our mission statement today as we collect a noisy offering for the Backpack program that supports children and youth that are in danger of not becoming all that they could be and break out of the cycle of poverty because they are too hungry to focus on learning. Let this be our chance to bring good news to the poor, to bring liberty to the oppressed and the captives.