

January 23, 2022

Texts: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Luke 4: 14-21

Title: "Jesus' First Sermon"

It's tough to preach your first sermon at a new church. Most pastors can't avoid being nervous at a time like that. I appreciate a story I read from Pastor John Jewell about his first time preaching as a supply pastor at Good Hope Church in a small town in Missouri. A local minister gave him directions to the church and said, "They'll be expecting you." Pastor Jewell hoped that meant the congregation was ready to welcome him.

But when Pastor Jewell got to the church, no one welcomed him. No one even seemed to notice he'd arrived. A few minutes before the service began, He tapped the shoulder of the man in front of him and introduced himself: "Hi. My name is John Jewell and I am preaching this morning." The man responded, "Nice to meet you, Mister Jewell, but I'm the pastor here and I thought I was preaching!" Talk about a surprise! But quickly they discovered that he was to be preaching at another church with the same name just a few miles down the road. Pastor Jewell sped to the other Good Hope Church as fast as he could, but when he got there, people were walking out the doors. They got tired of waiting. What a Sunday that was for Pastor Jewell.

Do you think Jesus ever showed up late to the synagogue on the Sabbath? I doubt it. Our passage from Luke is about the sabbath that Jesus was asked to preach. Unlike every other preacher on earth, Jesus wasn't nervous. But the other religious leaders should have been. Because no one could have anticipated what

he was about to say. He wasn't just going to interpret God's word. He was going to fulfill it. This would be a service to be remembered.

The passage Jesus read was from the prophet Isaiah, who'd lived about 700 years earlier. But instead of a long interpretation of the passage, Jesus simply ended his read it and said this: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Nobody was expecting that! Jesus, a local boy, a carpenter from a local family had just announced that he was the Messiah sent from God. How's that for something to talk about over Sabbath lunch?

The nation of Israel had waited 1,000 years for God to send His Messiah, His Anointed One. They didn't expect that one of their own would claim that title for himself. So what was Jesus talking about? If he was the long-promised Messiah, then what was God revealing about His mission?

The first thing we learn is that Christ came to bring good news to the poor. That's a vital truth that tells us a lot about God's heart, about God's character. When you have good news to tell, who do you want to share it with? You want to share it with those most affected by that news and in this case, it is the poor.

In the most affluent society in the world, there are still people for whom everyday life is a nightmare. Those are the people about which God is most concerned.

Jesus identified with those people. It's no accident that Christ's first bed was a manger, a feeding trough for animals, and that he spent his adult life without a home of his own, without any possessions beyond what he could carry as he

traveled from town to town.

God cares about the poor. Oh yeah. It's a major deal. Jesus loved them so much He chose to walk in their shoes. And he calls his followers to do the same. And so, Jesus' first sermon began with the words: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor" (Isaiah 61:1).

Another thing we learn is that God's love covers everyone who is hurting... of every station in life. Jesus' next words in this passage are, "He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Jesus meant these words literally. In his life on this earth, he set people free, he healed them, he stood up for those who weren't being treated fairly. He welcomed the rejects and looked out for the forgotten. And he never wavered in his mission to bring hope, healing and freedom to those who were most in need, including those who may have been rich in things but poor in spirit. No matter how good our lives may look on the outside, how many of us suffer from a poverty of spirit. Many of us are imprisoned by shame, anger, envy, fear, guilt and sorrow. No amount of money will take care of those things. Jesus can bring healing to your life!

And finally, we learn that God brings us hope to break free from the things that keep us in bondage. Because this passage shows us we have a God who loves us and cares about our pain and our problems, enough to endure them Himself. When we understand that kind of love, we can live more joyfully and

freely because we know a God who loves us that much will comfort and strengthen and provide for us in all circumstances and that all will be well.

I leave you with this story. Eddie Ogan is a woman of amazing faith in God, which she learned from her mother, who had to raise her and her six siblings. One of Eddie's favorite stories from her childhood involves something that happened one Easter many years ago. One month before Easter Sunday, the pastor announced that the church would be collecting a special offering for a needy family in the community.

After church, the Ogan family discussed how they could give sacrificially to the collection for the needy family. They decided to buy a large bag of potatoes and live off that for one whole month. This would allow them to save up \$20. They also decided to use as little electricity as possible for that month to save money on the electric bill. The children volunteered to get yard work and baby-sitting jobs to raise money. They even bought yarn to weave potholders to sell in the neighborhood.

Eddie said that this month before Easter was one of the most joyful her family had ever experienced. They were so excited to see their offering money grow a little bit more each day. They couldn't wait for Easter Sunday when they could put their money in the offering plate. The idea that they could help someone in need, that they could pass along some of the blessings God had given them, gave them so much joy that the extra sacrifices were fun.

Well, Easter Sunday came, a heavy rain poured down. Eddie and her siblings

put cardboard in their shoes to cover the holes and worn places, and they all walked to church. They had raised \$70 dollars for the special offering, and they couldn't contain their smiles when they placed those bills in the offering plate. After church, they sang all the way home, and celebrated with an Easter lunch of boiled eggs and potatoes.

To their surprise, the pastor knocked on their door that afternoon. He spoke briefly with Eddie's mother, then left. When Mrs. Ogan came back into the kitchen, all the joy had drained from her face. In her hand, she held an envelope containing that morning's special offering for a needy family. The envelope held \$87. Eddie and her family were in shock. They suddenly understood that they were the poor family in church. They'd never thought of themselves as poor! In fact, they felt sorry for families who didn't have what they had. They had love and faith and good friends and a safe home.

A sadness settled over the house that week. No one touched the special offering money. The children even protested when their mother woke them up for church the next Sunday. They didn't want to go. But she insisted.

That morning, there was a missionary visiting the church who spoke of his work in Africa, and the needs of the churches there. He asked the congregation to contribute to putting a solid roof on one of these churches. All it would cost was \$100.

Mrs. Ogan looked over at her children. They looked back at her, and the whole family began to smile. Without saying a word, she pulled the envelope with the

sacrificial offering out of her purse. When she dropped it in the offering plate, the joy returned to the Ogan family. And imagine the missionary's joy when he thanked the church for raising enough to buy a new roof for a church in Africa. He said to the pastor, "You must have some rich people in this church."

And Eddie wrote, "Suddenly it struck us! . . . We were the rich family in the church! Hadn't the missionary said so? From that day on I've never been poor again. I've always remembered how rich I am because I have Jesus!"

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor." One of the deepest questions people ponder is, "Is there a God?" And "If so, what is God like?" In Jesus' first sermon, he answers them both. God is right here with you. He's come to bring good news. And He cares about those who are hurting and in need. What more do you need to know? Isn't that a God you can trust with your life? I should say so! And I hope and pray that this morning we will do that anew...trust our lives to the God who's come to bring us good news. Amen.