

## The Good News of Deliverance

Scripture: Luke 4:14-30; Isaiah 61:1-11

Prayer: *God, remind us daily that you are for all people. Help us to receive your gift of healing even as we work to bring about your healing for others. Amen<sup>1</sup>*

“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.”

These are the words Jesus read in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. He is fresh from his baptism by John in the Jordan River and his encounter with the devil in the wilderness. He begins his ministry with the power of the Spirit. Word of his teaching is beginning to spread through the countryside. Now he arrives in his hometown of Nazareth to preach his inaugural sermon. When he speaks these prophetic words from Isaiah, he boldly proclaims that he is the fulfillment of the promise. First, the crowd reacts with amazement, delight, and wonder. Later, they react with anger, rage, and attempted violence.

The words Jesus reads come from the prophet Isaiah. These would have been familiar words to those in the synagogue, words of comfort and hope.

Isaiah 61 begins with a statement of purpose. The LORD has appointed me to tell the good news to the poor, to comfort those whose hearts are broken, to tell the captives they are free, to tell the prisoners they are released, to announce the time when the LORD will show his kindness and the time when our God will punish evil people, to comfort all those who are sad, to help the sorrowing people of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 61 continues with promises and predictions. The LORD has promised to give them a crown to replace their ashes, to give them the oil of gladness to replace their sorrow, to give them clothes of praise to replace their spirit of sadness. After God fulfills these promises to the people, then they will be called Trees of Goodness planted by the LORD to show his greatness; they will rebuild the old ruins and restore the places destroyed long ago; they will repair the ruined cities that were destroyed for so long.

In Isaiah 61, the writer proclaims that the Lord God is always present, even in suffering. God’s anointed one is sent to the oppressed, to the ones whose hearts are crushed, to the captives, the imprisoned and to all who mourn. It’s not stated here, but in order to reach those persons, God’s anointed one must also confront the perpetrators and sources of oppression, marginalization, hopelessness and despair. In addition, the mandate from God is to reverse their circumstances and transform their identity and activity.

God instructs the anointed one to pay particular attention to those who grieve over Zion, the sorrowing people in Jerusalem. It’s likely that Isaiah 61 was written after Israel’s exile in Babylon. They had returned to their homeland with permission to rebuild their city and their temple.

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<sup>1</sup> The prayer and parts of the sermon are adapted from Week 1 of “Seeking Justice Together” from *Current*, a curriculum from MennoMedia, [Current - Menno Media](#).

The sorrowing in Jerusalem referred to in Isaiah 61 rises out of frustration and humiliation over their failures – the failure to rebuild the city and the temple to match its former glory, the failure to reconcile the economic disparities and the religious and political disputes within the city. The reality of life in Jerusalem was nothing like their ideal – their expectations for a restored Jerusalem and a harmonious, righteous community.

The comfort God instructs the anointed one to provide will change the way the people see themselves, the way they are regarded by others and the ways they act. They are to be wrapped in victory, joy, and praise instead of depression and sadness. They will no longer be humiliated, fragmented, and dispirited. Then they will accomplish what is needed and what has been too difficult: rebuilding Jerusalem as a city where righteousness and justice flourish.

Throughout the ages, God's people have faced oppression, opposition, and obstacles. And in the face of oppression, opposition, and obstacles, God's people have sung songs of resistance. Think of Mary's song and Zechariah's words in Luke 1, the song of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15, Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2, and many psalms, for example, Psalm 146.

These songs provide visions of peace, wholeness, and well-being. They talk of resistance and restoration. They proclaim a radical realignment of the social order. They speak of the way God created things to be and how they could be again. Some even provide snapshots of how the vision is being lived out in the present.

This combination of peace, wholeness, and well-being, the way God created the world to be, can be summed up in one word, shalom. Shalom is God's dream for the world as it should be – whole, vibrant, flourishing, unified, at peace. It's more than the absence of conflict or strife. Shalom is the presence of the goodness of God, the presence of wholeness, completeness.

In the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus boldly proclaims that he has been sent by God to bring good news. The good news that he embodies is shalom – healing, freedom, and justice, not only for the people of Israel, but for all people. At first, Jesus' words are welcome. However, when he begins to flesh them out using the stories of foreigners, the good news sours quickly. The crowd realizes that the healing and freedom Jesus proclaims may not be for them, or at least not only for them. The good news of deliverance also contains difficult truth.

The bad news as we read the words of Isaiah is that God's vision is still a work in progress. While we catch glimpses of restoration and harmony where justice and righteousness flourish, we continue to see much brokenness, discord, injustice, and wrongdoing in our community and world. The disturbing news as we read Jesus' inaugural sermon is that while we easily identify with the powerless, the hungry, and the poor, we realize that compared to many people we are the powerful, the satisfied, and the rich. We participate in all the "isms" we condemn – consumerism, racism, sexism, absolutism, extremism, point-the-finger-ism. . . . the list could go on and on. We are a little too comfortable to consider how our way of life may negatively affect those around us.

The good news is that God always provides a way to hit the restart button. Jesus' greatest goal was to show us the way of the Father, to give us a glimpse of the kingdom of God, and then empower us to live out that good news. Jesus' mission was to usher in shalom.

Our summer worship series is called "Seeking Justice Together." As we read Bible stories about caring for the vulnerable and setting things right, we will encounter both good news and difficult truths. Together we will consider what the good news of deliverance looks like for each of us personally, for us a congregation, and for our wider community. May God our creator, Jesus our redeemer, and the Spirit our sustainer guide us on this journey toward kindness, courage, justice, peace, and love.