

**St John United Church of Christ**  
**Rev. Barbara Lohrbach**  
**January 21, 2007**

**Luke 4:14-21**

**The Anointed Ones**

Today's lesson tells us that immediately after Jesus returned from the wilderness, filled with the power of the Spirit, he went to work...Jesus rolled up his sleeves and began his ministry in the synagogue teaching. What was his work? The prophet Isaiah described, and Jesus echoed, what his work would encompass: bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, opening blinded eyes, and letting the oppressed go free.

How did Jesus know this was his work? While it is possible that the mysterious ways of God instilled this in Jesus, I believe it more likely that Jesus learned of his work much like we do...listening to the stories his people and their faith, learning of life from his family and community, in other words—growing up and living his life.

Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers...the ones who tell the story of Jesus...that tells us anything about Jesus between his birth and adulthood. Luke tells the story about the boy Jesus in the temple. And in this lesson in today's lectionary, Luke tells us that Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was his custom. Jesus learned about his ministry because he paid attention in synagogue and he went, like any good Jewish boy, every Sabbath. Jesus knew the stories of the Hebrew scriptures. He'd heard Isaiah read many times in his 30 years. Jesus knew what was said about the Anointed One who would come to bring good news.

Jesus also knew what life was like in his village and throughout Galilee. He knew about Roman occupation and Roman soldiers. He knew about taxes and most of all, Jesus knew what it was to be poor. He saw the effects of poverty in his world. Jesus saw those imprisoned and oppressed. And I believe that must have had a profound affect on Jesus as a boy and a young man making his way in the world.

So on this day in the synagogue, after being baptized and spending 40 days in

the wilderness, Jesus was ready to roll up his sleeves and get to work. Getting to this place in his life was the journey that Jesus had to take, just as we have to do it for ourselves as well. We don't go from birth to adulthood without learning a lot of lessons along the way.

Jesus was handed the scroll of Isaiah and he found this place where it says "the spirit of the Lord is upon me." He reads the words and then sits down as a rabbi

**St John United Church of Christ**  
**Rev. Barbara Lohrbach**  
**January 21, 2007**

would do to teach. Jesus assumed the role of teacher and rabbi and said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

The first public word of Jesus, apart from the reading of Scripture, is "today." "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The time is today. There must be changes in the conditions of the world. For those who are waiting for an end to oppression and poverty, it begins today. The time of God is today. Fred Craddock, preacher and theologian, comments that throughout Luke, "Today" never dissolves into yesterday or disappears into tomorrow. It is present and immediate.

And that is what I believe is God's message to us today...our today. God's Spirit is upon us. The Spirit of God is upon us today to do ministries of peace and justice. To speak of the Spirit is to speak above all of the power of God, as life-changing, world-transforming, church invigorating power to redeem and resurrect. God's people are called to be holy and loving in a world that has little time for holiness and even less time for love and justice.

Holiness is one of those "churchy" words that we don't understand very well. For many it is that unattainable state that we think imperfect humans can never achieve. So many people just don't bother. What would happen if we understood holy and holiness to be who we are? We are God's holy people. We are holy simply because we are God's. What would happen if we lived as holy people? Holy people created by God to love one another and to live together, sharing the resources of this planet that God also created with enough for everyone to live full and whole lives.

We know that there is the widening gap between the rich and the poor in this country and also globally. I believe that disparity between the haves and the have-nots is the single most important domestic and international, and perhaps theological, issue today. We see it everywhere, especially in a country as rich as ours. And as your pastor, I know the struggles of people in this community of faith and even more so in the area around us, to hold a roof over head and food on the table.

We see poverty in the world everywhere we turn, but especially in those places that have been ravaged by war and division, Iraq, half of Africa, Columbia, Peru, countries in Central America, the Balkans. It is astounding to recall that the richest 20% of the world consume 86% of the world's goods, while the poorest 20% use

**St John United Church of Christ**  
**Rev. Barbara Lohrbach**  
**January 21, 2007**

3% of the world's goods. 2 Billion people in the world lack safe drinking water. There are billions of children today who have no health care, no permanent home and no guarantee of peace or tranquility.

A wise old preacher once said that "the truth will make you free, but first it will make you miserable." The truth is that most of the members of this congregation are not oppressed. We are not all that rich, but most of us are not desperately poor, either. This creates for us a unique responsibility and calling. We ask, does God care about us and the answer is, of course! And God calls upon us to care for poor, the lost, and the oppressed in God's name and in the Spirit of Jesus. We are touched by the lives of our brothers and sisters and can respond with the same kind of love we have received. For us, to know God is to do justice.

Edward Markquart states in the course Witnesses for Christ:

God's story is always related to human need. For example, if a woman is dying of cancer, the gospel is God's strong word of resurrection. If a person is permeated with guilt, the gospel is God's assurance of forgiveness. If people experience extreme suffering, the gospel is the prayer: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble." For the starving, the gospel may be bread. For a homeless refugee, the gospel may be freedom in a new homeland. For others, the gospel may be freedom from political tyranny. The gospel is always related to human need. It is never truth in a vacuum, a theologically true statement which may or may not relate to one's life. The gospel is God's truth, God's message, God's action, God's word to a particular person, to a particular need, to a particular historical situation. **You don't throw a drowning person a sandwich. However good the sandwich may be, it just doesn't meet that person's need. You throw a drowning person a life jacket or a lifeline, or you dive in for the rescue. So it is with the gospel.** The gospel is God's truth, God's action, aimed at a particular human need. [p. 69, student book, emphases added]

Today we are the ones anointed to bring good news. We need to know God—the God who gave us life and who has given all we need to make a difference right now in this place. Today we are the ones anointed to bring the good news. See the poor, both the literal poor and the spiritual poor. See the captives, both the literal captives and the spiritual captives. See the blind. See the oppressed. And know that when our hearts break for the same things that break the heart of God, we will know what it is to be holy.

**St John United Church of Christ**  
**Rev. Barbara Lohrbach**  
**January 21, 2007**

Let us pray.

Sing "My Prayer" by Ken Medema

*I see the mother who cannot feed her family  
I see the boy who's begging in the street  
I see the old man homeless for so many years  
His voice is covered by the sound of rushing feet  
I see the women weeping in the village  
Streets flow with blood and husbands lost in war  
I see the orphans begging in the city  
While wealthy people live behind closed doors*

*Help me find a way  
I want to give my heart  
Teach me what to do  
Help me make a start  
Help me change my world a tiny bit each day  
Though it means a sacrifice this is what I pray*

*I see a young girl standing by the roadside  
She'll give her body before this night is done  
I see the young boys showing out their colors  
The streets will ring with the sound of angry guns  
I see the young boy riding in his wheelchair  
He fakes a smile, no one is his friend  
I see the widow lost without her partner now  
She only wants this agony to end*