

Jesus' Mission Statement - Rev. Denise Stone

Text: Luke 4:14-21

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What is a Mission Statement? Who has mission statements?

According to the Online Oxford Dictionary, a mission statement is

“a formal summary of the aims and values of a company, organization, or individual.”

Another definition of a Mission Statement is

a **concise explanation of the organization's reason for existence**. It describes the organization's purpose and its overall intention. The mission statement supports the vision and serves to communicate purpose and direction to employees, customers, vendors and other stakeholders.ⁱ

If you have worked in a corporate organization, you are probably very familiar with Mission / Vision Statements. Many churches have Mission Statements.

If you look on the bulletin board in Fellowship Hall, our Mission Statement reads: ????.

Now, a mission statement is really only good or useful if it is an accurate description of values and goals and everyone involved has “buy-in” to the statement.

Today, we are going to look at Luke, chapter 4, verses 14-21 to see what Jesus' Mission Statement was and what we can learn from it both as a church and as individuals. (Next week we will look at the initial reactions to Jesus' Mission Statement).

¹⁴ Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. ¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ "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,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."ⁱⁱ

The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

This is powerful stuff. In verses 18 and 19, Jesus is setting out a specific agenda for his ministry.

¹⁸ “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,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

It might be tempting to skip over the first two lines and get straight to the doing part of the statement.

Doing that, however, would be skipping over the “**concise explanation of the organization's reason for existence**” – in this case, Jesus’ reason for existence.

Jesus claims at the very outset that

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me

Jesus is going to be doing his ministry, his reason for existing, because the Spirit of the Lord is upon him and because the Spirit of the Lord has anointed him.

Let me encourage you to go back and read chapters 1-4:13 to see the times that the Spirit is involved in the coming and life of Jesus up to this point.

Jesus is God's anointed one, God's son. Jesus has a specific reason behind and for his life and ministry.

The next lines (all of which come from the Prophet Isaiah) explain Jesus' Mission Statement in more detail. I am going to outline these verses a little differently to help with explanations.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Jesus because the Spirit has anointed Jesus

- to bring good news to the poor.
- to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.
 - to proclaim release to the captives
 - and recovery of sight to the blind,
 - to let the oppressed go free

Not a heavy load at all, right?

This is an impressive and overwhelming list of tasks or goals.

And yet, Jesus fully claims this Mission in front of his hometown people there in Nazareth.

Let's look at some of this mission statement more specifically.

First, to bring good news to the poor.

Who is meant by the "poor"? And what is this "good news"?

Today, we typically think in terms of economics when we use the word “poor.” In Jesus’ day, the poor could be thought of in a much broader sense.

According to Professor Elisabeth Johnson,

The word translated “poor” (*ptochoi* in Greek) has to do with economic status as well as other factors that lowered one’s status in the first-century world—factors such as gender, genealogy, education, occupation, sickness, disability, and degree of religious purity. Jesus’ mission is directed to the poor in the holistic sense of those who for various reasons are relegated to the margins of society. Jesus refuses to recognize these socially determined boundaries, insisting that these very “outsiders” are the special objects of God’s grace and mercy.ⁱⁱⁱ

These other, non-financial factors are relevant today. Many people who are poor, economically, also fit into other categories that impact their ability to move out of that economic category. That is, these other factors often keep people “poor.”

Jesus is proclaiming good news to them, that God values the poor and that God embraces them. That in God’s kingdom, they are not outsiders at all.

Next, let’s look at goal to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. What does this mean?

New Testament scholars tell us that this line is a reference to the Old Testament idea of the Year of Jubilee.

Professor Johnson again explains,

The “year of the Lord’s favor” that Jesus proclaims is probably a reference to the year of Jubilee commanded in Leviticus 25, a year in which indentured servants (even resident aliens) were to be released, debts were to be forgiven, and land and property returned to families who had leased or sold them. ^{iv}

This was to happen every 50 years.

Jesus is proclaiming that with his coming, so comes the year of Jubilee. And with the year of Jubilee comes the remainder of his mission statement.

- to proclaim release to the captives
- and recovery of sight to the blind,
- to let the oppressed go free

Unlike some mission statements, Jesus’ mission statement was literal. He DID all of these things.

We will be spending more time in the Gospel of Luke this year and as we move through Luke’s Gospel, the words that Jesus claims here as his mission statement will become obvious in not just his words but in his actions over and over again.

Now, I can almost hear your thoughts.

“This is Jesus, the Son of God. Of course, he did all of these things. But I’m just a human being. This is way out of my league; out of OUR league.”

And it is for this reason we are to place our trust in Jesus, in a God who is so much bigger than we are. Later in John’s Gospel (*John 14:12-14*), Jesus tells his disciples (and by association he tells us)

¹² Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

We may want to make this more spiritual and all about Salvation, but that was not the message of Jesus.

The spiritual aspect of salvation in Luke cannot be separated from economic, social, and political realities. Jesus’ mission is to free people from captivity to sin and from captivity to the sinful structures and systems that diminish and destroy lives. ^v

Jesus’ mission statement was not some pie in the sky unattainable set of goals, Jesus’ mission statement was real and tangible.

As followers of Christ, it is our responsibility to pick up Jesus’ mission statement and make it our own.

We are to be involved in freeing people spiritually as well as from the oppressive structures and systems that hurt people.

One way we do this is through hosting the Big Flats Food Pantry in our building and through the efforts of our Shared Blessings Ministry. Those are important aids in helping people who are stuck in patterns of poverty.

That is not all we can and should do, however.

It is important for us to realize that we also have a role to play in our government by who we vote for and what we speak up for and against.

How we go about living our lives and living out our faith **matter**.

As Christians we are not called to sit idly by and let the world go on as it will, we are called to be actively engaged and to bring Jesus' life changing news into the reality of peoples' changed lives.

How will you take up Jesus' mission statement and make it your own?

How will we?

Let us pray.

O Christ, you lived as an ordinary man
not in style but simply,
yet still you caused uproar, and questions everywhere;
you drew the expectations of hungry crowds,
and brought buried conflicts to the light.

May we,

who are sometimes swayed by the crowd's approval,
and who often avoid conflict
for fear of its cost to us,
hold fast to the gospel of peace and justice
and follow faithfully in your way of compassion and solidarity
with those who are poor and excluded,
wherever it may lead us.
Amen.^{vi}

ⁱ <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/hr-ga/pages/isthereadifferencebetweenacompany%E2%80%99smission,visionandvaluestatements.aspx>.

ⁱⁱ Scripture passages are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-414-21-5>.

^{iv} <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-414-21-5>.

^v <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-luke-414-21-5>.

^{vi} Originally posted on the *Monthly Prayers* page (now **Weekly Worship**) of the Christian Aid website. <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/churches/weekly-worship>. Found at: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Epiphany%203%20C>.