



northminster presbyterian church

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roswell, georgia 30076

21-Jan-2007

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 Luke 4:14-21

SERMON: Most Likely... To Work With Wood! (Rev. Dr. Jim Simpson)

"Why Maude, isn't that Joseph's son, Mary's boy?" "Why sure it is!" We have a sense of how Nazareth initially responds to Jesus, who shows up in the local synagogue, reads the lesson and sits down ready to teach. You can almost hear the whispers and nudges, the knowing looks, the fond smiles, the childhood memories of and perhaps even the anticipation of what Jesus might do for his home town folk!

It is the kind of thing that happens in small towns. People are stereotyped... placed in cubby holes. It's hard for them to strike out on their own, to deviate from everyone's expectations, unless they move away. The man named the Future Farmer of the Year when a senior in high school. An honor... yes? maybe? But also a set-up, and lots of jealous classmates. For the rest of his adult life, he works way too hard to meet the expectations placed on him. There's talk in the café and on Main Street about how uppity he becomes: "Just who does he think he is?" An honor had become a burden, and a source of deep resentment among his neighbors, who secretly and not so secretly hoped he would fail. There was a terrible, visible toll, the stress destroyed his marriage, the business collapsed soon thereafter, secrets birthing a grim reality.

"Most Likely To Work With Wood" - that is what Jesus' High School Yearbook read, *every year!* And so it was, and had been, except now Jesus is more than a simple carpenter. For now He takes off as an itinerant preacher and rabbi, stepping outside of everyone's comfort zone. It takes a strong person to break out of the stereotypes placed on us by others. Jesus preached throughout all Galilee and the surrounding territory, taught in the synagogues and was praised by all. But his biggest challenge was in his home town Nazareth, there everybody knew him, his family and his trade.

The urgency of Luke 4:14-21 rushes at us headlong. Jesus reads this passage of messianic promise, of new life and restoration for all the people in the Messiah, and then inexplicably, Jesus says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Not "I have an idea for a study group." Not "At the end of time, all this will happen." Not "Wouldn't it be wonderful if you all would pay attention and do something about this." Not "God will take care of this if we just sit around and wait long enough." No, Jesus says, "I have been anointed to bring good news... and today I am doing that." Now. Right now, right here - *fulfilled in your hearing!*

Eyebrows were raised, heads were being scratched, the polite veneer of admiration and welcome warped into what we will discover next week to be an outrageous rage. Preaching had turned to meddling - *they weren't expecting Jesus to challenge them.*

Jesus proclaims that the words of the prophet are not about some distant or unknown future. The jubilee year, good news for the poor, release of captives, recovery of vision, liberation of the oppressed: *is now!* Emancipation is pronounced, now, this day, *today!* When the Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Lincoln on January 1, 1863, the slaves living in the Confederate States remained in bondage. Many knew little or nothing about the proclamation when it went into effect. Its authority was denied and nullified by local and regional power. Yet Lincoln, in both his words and his claim to authority over the whole of the split Union, contended that the proclamation held sway. This flawed and partial emancipation was the herald of a fuller freedom, a fulfillment unreached in its announcement but fully assured in the truth of what it described and declared.

Whenever Jesus read Scripture, Jesus fulfilled its Spirit. Jesus lived its teachings and embodied its truth, never more true than in Nazareth's synagogue. Think about it this way: *the Bible was and is about Jesus; Jesus was and is fulfilling all the prophets had said.* By placing himself in the prophetic line, Jesus offers not a new song, but a resurrection of the age-old song of God, sung over and over by the prophets. But now, Jesus offers a new verse that turns everything upside down, offering that He, Himself, is the fulfillment of the prophets' call; the embodiment of the Jubilee, which cancels all debts and frees the oppressed. He is the good news for the poor and for all peoples. Jesus offers this inaugural agenda as one to be accomplished by the power of the Spirit of God. As the One anointed by God Jesus will enact and embody this ministry, a radical claim that will mean trouble, *big trouble for Jesus!*

In Nazareth, Jesus read Isaiah as a description of his mandate: We gathered here in our gathering place of worship and prayer, we need the God of the Scriptures to claim us in the very same way. As Jesus sets the agenda for His ministry to unfold, so Jesus sets the agenda for our ministry as a church. Taken hold of by God, embraced by God's message of mercy and justice, held in the tender yet bloodied arms of our Savior, we must, *we must*, live and proclaim good news to the poor by drawing them away from the margins and into the center of life. We *must* speak for those who have no voice. We *must* advocate for social and political change to alleviate the plight of the economically poor. We *must* proclaim God's unconditional love for those who are beaten down by life. We *must* proclaim release to those in bondage emotionally, physically, economically working for their release. We *must* proclaim recovery of sight for the blind, turning on lights and opening doors and windows so they can see the glory of God. We *must* work to free the oppressed of all nations as well as those oppressed by inner demons or other forms of domination. We *must* adopt Jesus' agenda - *this is what it means to be followers and disciples of our Lord.*

Such a calling is daunting, but our call as disciples of Jesus is not solitary. We are called as community to work together for the agenda of God. And we have God's own power in the Holy Spirit to see this agenda forward bit by bit, living its truth and meaning. We need to rely upon the Holy Spirit as we move out into the world to carry on Jesus' inaugural agenda as we live as agents of change in God's world. We are called to embody the good news as Jesus did by allowing the Spirit to anoint and name us each day as we go forth to do our work. So is it possible? Can the mandate of Jesus, these hopeful, loving, yet demanding words of Jesus be fulfilled in our hearing, now, today, here in Northminster? Is it possible? I stand before you today to declare that it is, *and it must be so.*

The mission and mandate of Jesus was fulfilled here in *our Nazareth*, in December with the visit of the Choir from the Atlanta Transitional Center. In welcoming these men, who have and are serving their time in Georgia's penal system, and who are preparing for their release, we were proclaiming and sharing release for the captives! As they shared their music and their story, as they shared their message "Make the right choice: choose freedom!", they were proclaiming release to us, preventing us from joining the ever-increasing prison population in the United States.

The mission and mandate of Jesus was fulfilled here in *our Nazareth* when we chose to speak up for our brother Lino Capistrano from the Ebenezer Church, when he was lured, *lured*, in by the authorities; told he wouldn't need a lawyer, arrested and "disappeared" from his wife and family - *right here in the United States.* As you called the people you knew, as you prayed, as you lobbied, as you knocked on doors, *you spoke on behalf of those denied a voice!*

The mission and mandate of Jesus is fulfilled here in *our Nazareth* through our commitment to the Angel Food Program. Not only by making quality affordable food available to those who can pay for that food at a great discount, but as Northminster provides free food to all new residents at Drake House, a Residential Center for Women and Children. *we are proclaiming good news to the poor!*

The mission and mandate of Jesus is fulfilled here in *our Nazareth* when we welcome the weary and the broken, not so we can point fingers, assign blame or stare at the pain and rejection they endured out there in society, but so we can discover with them, the healing that can only come from God in community, *as we proclaim God's unconditional love!*

The mission and mandate of Jesus is fulfilled here in *our Nazareth* when we give ourselves away, working on God's behalf among any and all who need to know that they matter; who need to know God loves them, who need to experience in us not a club with rules and an image to maintain, but a church of Jesus Christ in the truest sense, a community of welcome and hospitality. But don't skip over that first part. We do this as we give ourselves away - our time, our money, our energy, our emotion, our lives, *this has to be the way!*

Over the last two weeks, the Officers and Staff have been working hard refining what we call *GIFT*. *GIFT* stands for **G**rowing **I**nspiring **F**aith **T**ogether. We see *GIFT* as God's plan for us in line with the mandate of Jesus: a way we can encapsulate Jesus' mandate in a way we can understand, get excited over, communicate to others and around which and by which our church can hustle and thrive and live as we follow Jesus' mandate. As part of this process, the Officers have told me very clearly that I should stop, *absolutely STOP*, all the worry over our Budget and our struggle to gather enough regular annual income to match the work we intend to do! I want to say this publicly, so you know why this is what I will attempt to do as they have advised and instructed. This one last time, however, I get to make the point, because it bears making: *The mandate of Jesus asks us to give ourselves away and this congregation does have the financial resources that it can give away to support all that we do and much more!* We need to be giving it away. Because we have so many ways in which we can better fulfill the mission and mandate of Jesus here in *our Nazareth* as we all give our money away!

Let me describe one such vision I could suggest, a vision no one has heard or discussed or approved... *maybe God has a message for us!* Our congregation has a long involvement with Habitat for Humanity. That involvement requires the bringing together of mission dollars and volunteer time. The greater our financial commitment, the more volunteer opportunities we create for ourselves - that is the Habitat system. This year Kenya, one of our current HomeStretch moms, will work through the process in preparation for her family to receive a new Habitat Home to be built in 2008. Imagine with me for a moment, imagine what it would mean if this congregation were able by the start of 2008 to fund all or the lion's share of the \$80,000 that this new home will cost. Imagine if this congregation, *all of us*, and also your friends and neighbors and work colleagues and tennis partners, were then able to form the bulk of the work crew weekend after weekend partnering with Kenya to lovingly build that Habitat home, **Growing Inspiring Faith Together!** Just imagine all that such a project could mean and offer, all it would ask of us and all it would bring to us - **Growing** - a new home, a new place for a family to grow, growing in generosity, growing in **Faith**, growing in relationships **Together**, growing as a congregation as we welcome into our active membership people who would certainly be drawn here by this action and story! *Inspiring* - yes it would be... **Faith** in action... **Together** taking on something we have never done before! *How??*

1. *Make a commitment to become personally involved.*
2. *By linking our personal involvement with our spiritual faith.*
3. *By advocating for and supporting faith-based organizations like Habitat, that make a difference.*

Unpacking the message of Jesus, living Jesus' mission and mandate, *GIFT - Growing Inspiring Faith Together*. There is one Spirit, *but a variety of gifts*. There is one Lord, *but a variety of ways that people serve*. There is one God and Father, *but a variety of ways that people work for the Kingdom*. God gives different gifts to different people. To some, a passion for peace, to others, a passion for political freedom. To some, a passion for life and its sacredness, To others, a passion for forgiveness and mercy. To some, a passion for a more closed interpretation of the Bible, to others, a passion for a more open interpretation of the Bible. To some, a passion for evangelism, to others, a passion for justice. All of these people are here in this church, and all of them are needed to fulfill the mission and the mandate of Jesus, proclaiming the Good News to the poor and releasing the prisoners. *Thanks be to God! Amen.*

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

12For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18But as it is, God arranged the

members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. **19**If all were a single member, where would the body be? **20**As it is, there are many members, yet one body. **21**The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." **22**On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, **23**and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; **24**whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, **25**that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. **26**If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. **27**Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. **28**And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. **29**Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? **30**Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? **31**But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Luke 4:14-21

14Then 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."

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