

Identity and Purpose Luke 4:14-21

January 2022

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Jesus Begins His Ministry

¹⁴ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and 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 proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

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

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

Intro

I value good questions. Questions are good!

There are big questions about life and reality that serious people ask. I like them.

But today I want to consider two big questions about Jesus, us individuals and us as a fellowship. I am going to ask them about Jesus and then about us because that's what Jesus People do!

I am going to take my questions to the gospel passage for today about a day when Jesus went to 'Church'/Synagogue on the Sabbath - much like you are doing here today.

Question #1 Who is Jesus?

When we ask a who question we are asking about a personal relational context.
Relationship established identity.

Maori answer the who question of identity with a *whakapapa* on basis that if you know someone's ancestry then you know who they are. It's like being called 'Thompson' as son of Thom or 'McNeil as son of Neil.

To get identity clear today we consider ancestry, family, friends, associates etc, perhaps even sports clubs or old schools?

The four Evangelists begin by focusing on the 'Who?' question and want to tell us who Jesus is because it determines everything!

Luke does it this way in his gospel:

1. He begins with stories about Jesus' cousin John, his mother Mary, Aunt Elizabeth and the circumstances of Jesus' birth.
2. Then he describes how Jesus was affirmed as God's Son when John the Baptist baptized him in the Jordan. That all builds the answer: Jesus is one whom God delights in as His Son.
3. Luke then gives us a paternal *whakapapa* or genealogy going back to Adam.
 - a. So we know Jesus as a son of heaven and of earth.

- b. That identity is then tested in the wilderness temptation. What sort of son is Jesus going to be given that Adam failed as a son as has Israel? Jesus passes that test with a 3/3 pass to show that he is the son who will not fail as a son.

That is Luke's answer to the who question in chapters 1 to 3 of his Gospel.

Jesus' social context is described and his prime relationship established as the Beloved Son of God.

Question #2 What is Jesus all about?

Now that we know who Jesus is comes the question: What are his intentions? What is he all about?

That is what today's reading from Luke 4 speaks into.

The setting is that having won a spiritual battle with the Devil Jesus is spiritually in top form -full of the Holy Spirit- and he begins to speak in ways that impressed people. He was priming the pump, perhaps cultivating an audience and public profile? People have started asking at least two questions: Who was Jesus? and What was he about?

The place where people then knew him best was where he grew up, in Nazareth.

His family was known there and he had been a tradesman with his Father. He knew the people and was known in the local Synagogue. So that was the place he choose to set out what he was about as his Father's Son. It would not end well!

The place to get a serious audience in Nazareth was at the synagogue on Sabbath.

So that's where Jesus goes. He is given the honour of reading out scripture from the prophet Isaiah.

This synagogue may have been where Jesus was taught to read the scripture in preparation for his Bar Mitzvah at age 12? Imagine going back to the church you grew up in?

As I read it Jesus goes to Nazareth to present his ministry manifesto in the Synagogue.

This is like a political party's program in election year, his statement of intended action to set out what his intentions were.

Before we join Jesus in that moment let's take stock of our baseline.

What do you already think Jesus was all about?

People have all sorts of ideas as to what Jesus was actually all about.

- * Some say he came to teach spiritual truths like a mystic, guru or swami changing consciousness.
- * Some say he taught the way of love and universal brotherhood - *did you hear that at Christmas?*
- * Some say he was meek and mild and just went with the natural flow as an organic child of the cosmos.
- * Some say he came to get us to heaven.

Q What would your first answer to be if asked, "What was Jesus all about?"

A Let's hear Jesus in words he chose from Isaiah 62:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,

to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Having brought this reading people then expected some comment, explanation.
 I imagine Jesus had such a presence that when he read people knew something was happening?

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

And no one knew what to think so Jesus spelled it out in ways that resulted in him being thrown out of the Synagogue and his home town. That story comes next week.

But back to his statement of intent delivered in Nazareth paraphrased:

“I have been guided and empowered for the purpose of declaring good news to the poor, Liberty to those in captivity, recovery of sight to the blind, Liberty for the oppressed, And a year of God’s favour.

Jesus is saying he is about speaking things that represent salvation to the human condition as suffering the consequences of sin.

He is focused on

- the **Poor** - those with no choice and options
- **Captives** - freedom taken away
- **Blind** - not just physical
- Those **Oppressed** - pressed down by power
- And the way society needs a reset

Q How does this relate to what you had in mind as Jesus’ Mission Statement?

Q Is there good news personally for you here?

Are you Poor, Captive, Blind, Oppressed or needing a reset in any way?
 Do we look to Jesus for salvation in these things?

Q How does this compare with your intentions as a Christian on mission?

Are you orientated to the Poor, Captives, the Blind, and the Oppressed?

Q How does this compare with what we as a Church set out to do?

Are we orientated to the Poor, Captives, the Blind, and the Oppressed?

The Who and What Questions about Jesus are now answered by Chapter 4.

Application

So to bring this all home here today:

We need to be clear about what shapes our vision for **who** we are and **what** we are about both as individuals and as a church.

What I want to stress is that our answers should be Jesus referenced.

The answer to every question is ‘Jesus’.

Who he is draws our attention and what he intends sets what we are to join him in.

Our identity as believers and as a church must flow from Jesus.

Christians can easily drift to shift identity from Jesus to something else without being aware. Jesus gets reduced to being a sticker label or faded paint not true to the contents or substance. That's when Christians starting doing bad and crazy things while Christianity gets the blame. It happens in so many diverse ways. Instead of Jesus the living Lord people draw their identity from something like, the Bible, Social justice, Worship Styles, Ethics, Legalism, Denomination or Status. One we need to watch out for is when the Holy Spirit no longer sounds like Jesus.

Moments of test, crisis or critical decision are times when we realize where we are in relation to Jesus or who we think we really are.

Are we really deeply referenced to Jesus, holding him as God's Word to us in human form or something else yet while thinking we are Christians?

Our right identity should flow from our relationship with Jesus.

That is what our baptism is all about.

It's about grounding us in Jesus so that he lives in us.

Then and only then do our intentions flow out of Jesus' intentions.

In international churches people often arrive and asked, "What sort of church it is?" They bring the questions that matter to them. One question that sometimes came was: "Is this a Bible Church?" I eventually worked out what that meant. The answer I formed was that, "No, this is a Jesus Church." That is what I believe we should say about every church.

Today we heard What Jesus was about - what his intentions were.

His intentions were those of his Heavenly Father and empowered by his Spirit, this was his expression of that in words anticipated by Isaiah 600 years earlier.

Conclusion:

I am pleading here for us to be a fellowship that is defined by who Jesus is and what he set out to do.

Only when we get alignment here is it worthwhile asking the How? Question - How do we do this in Dunedin 2022?

Trying to ask the how question when the Who and What questions have not been answered is futile yet it's the pit so many fall into before wondering why it does not work. It's partly why we can get so stuck in management thinking we can avoid the primary questions.

The 'Who Question' for any church is answered in relation to Jesus

The 'What Question' for any church is shaped by this mission statement of Jesus heard today.

The 'How we do that Question?' is up to us and the Holy Spirit.