

C Ordinary 3  
2013 January 27  
Luke 4:14-21  
“Oh. That's Why!”

Most of us are familiar with the concept of a mission statement, a brief description of the purpose of a group or organization or company. Mission statements can be great motivators and, when employed as they should be, can work to keep an organization going in a single, predetermined, and hopefully productive direction.

On the Internet you can find what are called “mission statement generators” which simply take a set of common business buzz-words: verbs, nouns, adverbs, and adjectives, and mix them together such that the resulting sentence is a grammatically correct mission statement, but which is utter nonsense. I think the people who produce these generators have had bad experiences with mission statements in the past. I found one of these “mission statement generators” and tried a few times to see what kind of nonsense it would produce. Here's a few examples of what came out.

We will work together to conveniently recontextualise user-centric meta-services so that we may endeavor to interactively create corporate opportunities while encouraging personal employee growth.

We will work cooperatively to competently productize high-quality infrastructures as well as continue to completely leverage error-free opportunities to set us apart from the competition.

Our business is to continue to enthusiastically leverage existing viral resources to allow us to endeavor to dramatically restore scalable methods.

You get the idea. Anyway, I think the results are pretty funny.

Some people, in reading Luke 4, believe that verses 18 and 19 contain the mission statement that Jesus sets for himself. I think there is more than a little truth to that interpretation.

Jesus has just returned from his 40-day temptation in the wilderness, during which the devil works feverishly to get Jesus to repudiate his mission. That doesn't work, of course. Read Luke 4:1-13. The story of Jesus being tempted is beyond our scope today, but note how that story begins: “Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.” Note the important role that the Holy Spirit plays in the temptation narrative.

After he emerges from the wilderness, Jesus returns to Galilee and to his hometown Nazareth, “filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.” Note again the Spirit at work in the ministry of Jesus. And remember the prominent role that the Spirit is going to play throughout Luke's gospel and then into the sequel to that gospel, the book we know as “The Acts of the Apostles.” For Luke, the Holy Spirit is a central character in the ministry of Jesus, the Messiah.

On a particular sabbath day Jesus goes to the synagogue “as was his custom.” As was his custom. Jesus himself, according to Luke, regularly attended sabbath meetings at the synagogue. We could spend some time reflecting on what that means in terms of our faithful attendance at sabbath meetings.

Scripture was always read in these sabbath meetings. Jesus is given the scroll of Isaiah and reads from Isaiah chapter 61. Actually, the words recorded in Luke are a paraphrase of what is

written in Isaiah. I think Jesus has memorized those verses, and quotes them with some minor additions.

What does he say? “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.”

Jesus explicitly mentions: the poor; the captives; the blind; and the oppressed. These verses from Isaiah 61 also include this mention of “the year of the Lord’s favor,” which is widely taken to refer to the jubilee year in Jewish practice. Every 50 years, according to the prescription of Leviticus chapter 25, Jewish slaves are to be set free by their Jewish masters, and all debts between Jews are to be forgiven and forgotten. That idea connects well with good news for the poor, release of captives, and freedom for the oppressed.

After Jesus finishes reading the brief passage from Isaiah, which he has paraphrased, he returns the scroll and sits down. Luke says the the eyes of the entire assembly are fixed on him. Then, while still seated, he says quietly, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Jesus is not just reading ancient words from Isaiah. He is stating his own mission. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. The Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, new sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed. He has sent me to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Today this scripture has been fulfilled.”

Oh, we might say: I could have had a V-8. No. Oh, we might say: that’s why he came. That’s why he came.

In addition to the highly prominent role that the Holy Spirit plays in Luke’s gospel, that gospel is characterized by another unique theme: the centrality of Jesus’ concern and compassion for the poor, the outcast, the forgotten, the powerless, the marginalized, the weak, and the vulnerable. Of all of the four gospel characterizations of Jesus, Luke’s account is the one which most confirms Jesus’ deep love for these people.

Jesus made a regular habit of worship attendance. Therefore, we should, too. Jesus maintained a profound concern for powerless and vulnerable people. Therefore, we should, too.

As we work our way through Luke’s gospel during this year, be watching for those many times and places in which Jesus expresses his compassion for the vulnerable. Actually, you won’t have to watch too closely, because I will make it a point to draw your attention to them. If this attitude and this practice is so very important to Christ, how can we possibly avoid the same attitude and practice?

If there is anything that becomes clear in reading the scriptures, both the Hebrew ones and the Greek ones, it is that none of us are free from the conditions for which Jesus has been anointed and sent. Not all of us are poor in material things, but all of us are poor in understanding, grasping, and pursuing the kingdom of God. All of us are captive to sinful impulses and thoughts, even though we know that in Christ we are no longer slaves to sin. All of us are blind, failing to see who Jesus is, and failing to see his claim on our lives. And all of us are oppressed by fear, anxiety, idolatry, and selfishness.

All of this means, of course, that Jesus was anointed and sent for you and for me, for all of us.

At the same time, we can be misled by assuming that the only reason Jesus was anointed and sent was to bring good news and relief to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. In determining the full extent of his mission, we have to look at the full extent of the scriptural record, and there are numerous instances, most especially in the Gospel of John, in which Jesus explicitly tells us that he has come to bring us eternal life. In John, chapter 10, he says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly." References to abundant and eternal life abound in John's gospel.

So if we assume that the mission statement of Luke 4:18-19 is the only reason that Jesus was sent by his Father, we make a serious error. Jesus was indeed anointed and sent to bring good news and relief to vulnerable people. And he was indeed sent to that we might have life abundant and eternal. Not just one or the other, but both.

"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."

According to Jesus himself, this is why he was anointed, and this is why he was sent. Remember that Jesus Christ means simply Jesus Anointed. Anointed and sent to bring good news, release, sight, and freedom. That's why he was sent. And he continues that work, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to this day, in you, in this, his church, in all branches of his church, and throughout the world.

And of course, we are called to join in.