



Following Jesus: The Way, The Truth, The Life

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Stewardship of Gifts

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GOING BEYOND THE SERMON

SERMON SERIES OVERVIEW

Following Jesus is based on selected passages in Luke 3-4. These chapters highlight Jesus's preparation for and beginning of ministry in Galilee. There is much here for all Christians to observe and obey in our discipleship journey of following Jesus. The entire text is presented here, with each Sunday's readings in bold print.

LUKE 3

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, ² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.

⁵ Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth;

⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

⁷ John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹ Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" ¹¹ In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." ¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" ¹³ He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

The Baptism of Jesus (January 9)

¹⁵ **As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah,** ¹⁶ **John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie**

the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ **His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."**

¹⁸ So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. ¹⁹ But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰ added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

²¹ **Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened,** ²² **and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."**

²³ Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work. He was the son (as was thought) of Joseph son of Heli, ²⁴ son of Matthat, son of Levi, son of Melchi, son of Jannai, son of Joseph, ²⁵ son of Mattathias, son of Amos, son of Nahum, son of Esli, son of Naggai, ²⁶ son of Maath, son of Mattathias, son of Semein, son of Josech, son of Joda, ²⁷ son of Joanan, son of Rhesa, son of Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, son of Neri, ²⁸ son of Melchi, son of Addi, son of Cosam, son of Elmadam, son of Er, ²⁹ son of Joshua, son of Eliezer, son of Jorim, son of Matthat, son of Levi, ³⁰ son of Simeon, son of Judah, son of Joseph, son of Jonam, son of Eliakim, ³¹ son of Melea, son of Menna, son of Mattatha, son of Nathan, son of David, ³² son of Jesse, son of Obed, son of Boaz, son of Sala, son of Nahshon, ³³ son of Amminadab, son of Admin, son of Arni, son of Hezron, son of Perez, son of Judah, ³⁴ son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham, son of Terah, son of Nahor, ³⁵ son of Serug, son of Reu, son of Peleg, son of Eber, son of Shelah, ³⁶ son of Cainan, son of Arphaxad, son of Shem, son of Noah, son of Lamech, ³⁷ son of Methuselah, son of Enoch, son of Jared, son of Mahalaleel, son of Cainan, ³⁸ son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God.

LUKE 4

The Temptation of Jesus (January 16)

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ² **where for**

forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished.³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."⁴ Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

⁵ Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world.⁶ And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please.⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours."⁸ Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

⁹ Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,¹⁰ for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,'

¹¹ and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

¹² Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

The Path of Jesus (January 23)

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."²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"²³ He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And

you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" ²⁴ And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown.²⁵ But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land;²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.²⁷ There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

³¹ He went down to Capernaum, a city in Galilee, and was teaching them on the sabbath.³² They were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority.³³ In the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice,³⁴ "Let us alone! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."³⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" When the demon had thrown him down before them, he came out of him without having done him any harm.³⁶ They were all amazed and kept saying to one another, "What kind of utterance is this? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and out they come!"³⁷ And a report about him began to reach every place in the region.

The Community of Jesus (January 30)

³⁸ After leaving the synagogue he entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked him about her.³⁹ Then he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. Immediately she got up and began to serve them.

⁴⁰ As the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various kinds of diseases brought them to him; and he laid his hands on each of them and cured them.⁴¹ Demons also came out of many, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah.

⁴² At daybreak he departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowds were looking for him; and when they reached him, they wanted to prevent him from leaving them.⁴³ But he said to them, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose."⁴⁴ So he continued proclaiming the message in the synagogues of Judea.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S-Scripture: Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

Before Jesus appears on the scene, John the Baptist comes before him, famously preparing the way for the Messiah. Take time to read all of chapter 3, because as N.T. Wright says, “Luke’s introduction to the story of John the Baptist is designed to give us a fairly precise date when it happened (hence the names of political and religious rulers of the day), but actually it gives us a lot more besides. Behind the list of names and places is a story of oppression and misery that was building up to explosion point.” (Luke for Everyone, p. 32)

Under Roman rule the Jews found themselves slaves again – this time in their own country. Their religious leaders weren’t excelling either. John’s call to the Jews to be baptized for repentance of sins (formerly reserved for Gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism) shows that the time was at hand for national, religious, and *personal* change from the inside out.

Jesus presented himself as an act of initiation into his own prophetic ministry. Here, at the scene of his baptism, his identity is confirmed. “You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.”

A- Apply

We are reading these passages and hearing the sermons during Chapelwood’s Stewardship of Gifts campaign. While none of the Scriptures are from the “giving stories” of the Bible, look closely at John’s and Jesus’s attitudes and actions in these two chapters. What kinds of struggles face the people in Jesus’s day? What kinds of instructions, warnings, behaviors, and comfort are given and received? A few examples are highlighted below.

In Luke 3: 7 – 14, John admonishes the people coming to him for baptism. He wants real repentance to be their motivation and he expects to see them bear good fruit. He gives three examples of how to bear fruit.

Share from your abundance. “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise,” he told the crowd.

Be honest. “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you,” he told the tax collectors.

Be content. “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages,” he told the soldiers.

“Simple, clear commands; but if they were obeyed they would demonstrate that people meant business. None of these things happens by chance; they only occur when people have genuinely repented of the small-scale injustices which turn a society sour,” says Wright. (p. 36)

What are some simple steps you can take this week to share from your abundance, be more honest, and be content?

P-Pray

Jesus, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In what Way do you want to lead me in response to this teaching from your word? Amen.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S-Scripture: Luke 4: 1-15

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

Keep in mind when reading Luke 3 and 4, that the gospel writer is proclaiming the identity of Jesus. So far, we see him as a Jewish man living in the time of Roman occupation in Israel, being heralded by his cousin John the Baptist as the Messiah. At his baptism, God speaks, and the Holy Spirit descends, confirming that Jesus is the Son of God. "Together the baptism story and the family tree (genealogy in Luke 3:23-38) tell us where Jesus has come from, who he is, and where he is going. As we make his story our own in our own prayers, and indeed in our own baptism, we too should expect both the fresh energy of the spirit and the quiet voice which reminds us of God's amazing, affirming love and of the path of vocation which lies ahead." (Wright, Luke for Everyone, p. 41)

Before Jesus steps fully into his vocation, he is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Commentators agree that at this point in his life, Jesus was faced with the question of *how* he would usher in God's kingdom. "How is he to be Israel's representative, her rightful king? How can he deliver Israel, and thereby the world, from the grip of the enemy? How can he bring about the real liberation, not just from Rome and other political foes, but from the arch-enemy, the devil himself?" (Wright, p. 43)

Jesus experienced Satan's attack on a personal level. "He was tempted in regard to the goals to be achieved, the methods of achieving them, and the authority he would have as the Messiah. These three areas of concern about his life as the Messiah are often areas of concern for us as Christians. (Key to Luke, Part 1 by Horace R. Weaver and Harold L. Fair, pp. 20-21). From Jesus' temptation we see that the human needs for physical provision (stones into bread), authority over the material world (worship me and it will all be yours), and divine protection (throw yourself down from here) will not be met apart from trusting ourselves to God's love, hope, and faithfulness.

A-Apply

Most of us have been taught that Jesus rebuked the tempter by the power of the Holy Spirit and with the Word of God. The example set by Jesus is one we must and can follow. Jesus heard God's voice during his temptation. For this to happen, he had to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14) and steeped in the Hebrew scriptures (Luke 4:4, 8, 12). We too, can be filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus told his earliest followers, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8) Galatians 5:16-26 admonishes us to "Live by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh . . . if we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another." These are the same temptations Jesus faced. Ephesians 5:15-18 says, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit."

Soaking up God's word in as many ways as possible is a hallmark of the Christian life. A daily reading habit, a weekly Bible study with others, listening to an audio Bible, and attending worship regularly are excellent ways to engage Scripture. Psalm 119:105 says "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Jesus learned the Scriptures as a young boy. Luke 2:41-52 record the story of him lingering in the temple, left behind by his family so that he could "sit among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." Stephen, Paul and Peter were able to tell the entire history of the Israelites from memory in order to convince thousands of new believers that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. (See Acts 3, 7, 13)

As we approach the time to make our estimates of giving for Chapelwood's stewardship of gifts campaign, how are you being filled with the Spirit and with God's word to guide you in the very practical aspects of your financial life and in your giving? It is in these "rubber-meets-the-road" places that God wants to do a work in our hearts, just as God met Jesus' very real needs in the wilderness.

P-Pray

Jesus, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. What Truth from this passage do you want to use to change me? Amen.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S-Scripture: Luke 4:14-30

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

The devil has left Jesus alone for now, but the Holy Spirit has not left and is filling him with power as he embarks on his mission. He goes to Galilee and begins to teach in the synagogues, including the one in his hometown of Nazareth. Jesus makes his mission clear by reading from the prophet Isaiah: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to tell the poor the good news. He has sent me to announce release to the prisoners and sight to the blind. To set the wounded victims free; to announce the year of God’s special favor.”

“Today,” he says, “this scripture is fulfilled in your own hearing.” He declares himself as the Messiah and lays out the conflict that will come in the world when he lives out his mission. The people in that day were not that different than today. If a prophet came into our church and declared that the mission of God is to focus on the poor, to release the inmates, heal the blind, and minister to society’s most wounded humans, how would that be received, really? Might we also “fly into a rage” and kick that prophet out of church and out of town as well?

Jesus tries to help his hometown friends and loved ones see that this has always been God’s mission. He reminds them of the widow in Zarephath – a Gentile woman who received help from God’s prophet Elijah in the midst of a great famine. Hers is a “giving story.” (1 Kings 17:8-16) God commanded this Gentile woman from Sidon to feed Elijah from her limited supply of food. Despite being down to her last meal, she places her faith in “the Lord your God” of Elijah to make food first for the prophet, then for her son and herself. “The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.” The story continues with Elijah restoring life to the woman’s son when he died. The Jews were shown that the power of the God of Israel extends to foreigners.

Next, Jesus points out to his home-church community that Elijah’s successor prophet Elisha healed just one leper in a time when leprosy plagued multitudes. That one leper was Naaman, the commander of the *enemy* army of Aram. (2 Kings 5:1-14) After his healing, Naaman said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.”

Well, these Scriptural examples sent the Nazarenes over the edge. As N.T. Wright says in “Luke for Everyone,” “This message was, and remains, shocking. Jesus’ claim to be reaching out with healing to all people, though itself a vital Jewish idea, was not what most first-century Jews wanted or expected. As we shall see, Jesus coupled it with severe warnings to his own countrymen. Unless they could see that this was the time for their God to be gracious, unless they abandoned their futile dreams of a military victory over their national enemies, they would suffer a defeat themselves at every level – military, political and theological.” (pp. 48-49)

A- Apply

How do you react when you hear Scripture taught in a way that does not line up with your interpretation, or traditional understanding? N.T. Wright says that the gospel can still bring about a violent reaction (as it did on the day of Jesus’ appearance in Nazareth), when it “challenges all interests and agendas with the news of God’s surprising grace.”

Can you think of a Biblical teaching or principal that has broadened or expanded in meaning for you over time? How did you first begin to consider the passage in a new light? Did you spend time in prayer over the concept? Did you talk with a pastor or Christian friend about your changing view? How has the teaching affected your view of God? Of others? Of yourself? Of the world?

To open the hearts of his followers, Jesus told parables, applied Hebrew scriptures to new situations, and acted out Biblical teaching through hospitality, breaking barriers, and healing people. He consistently called Jews and Gentiles alike to see God and God’s purposes in new ways. How might he be calling you to open your heart today?

P-Pray

Jesus, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. How do you want to conform me to your Life, so that I am a living reflection of you? Amen.

BIBLE S.W.A.P.

S-Scripture: Luke 4:38-44

W-What Does it Mean and What Can I Obey?

This passage is tiring to read! Jesus is busy from sunup to sundown on this Sabbath day – healing his friend Peter’s mother-in-law as well as a whole bunch of other people he doesn’t know. On top of sickness, he is faced with demons who have possessed ordinary people. What a display of opposition Jesus faced in Capernaum, the village where he set up his ministry headquarters. After working most of the night, healing and casting out demons, when the sun came up, he went off to a deserted place where the crowds hunted him down and begged him not to leave. Jesus did not resist the workload; he just knew that his mission called him to go to more towns and synagogues to preach the Good News.

While the day and night was full, Jesus acted out of his authority. “(Jesus) did what he did by simple commands. . . He just told the spirits to go, and they went. That was what astonished people. He didn’t have to summon up stronger powers than his own; he just used the authority he already possessed in himself. And, as this passage makes clear, he did the same with ‘ordinary’ diseases as well, like the raging fever of Simon’s mother-in-law,” writes Wright (pp. 51-52). “Once again Luke wants us to recognize what all this is saying about Jesus. Those with special insight can see behind his work and teaching, where he appeared to most people as a prophet. He was **‘the son of God’**, here in the sense of **‘the Messiah’**. He was God’s anointed. The Lord’s **Spirit** was indeed resting on him, as he said at Nazareth, to release the oppressed, to give sight to the blind, to unloose the chains of the prisoners.”

A-Apply

The title of this final sermon in our Stewardship of Gifts series is “The Community of Jesus.” The stories in Luke 4 take place in Jesus’ “stomping grounds” around Galilee. He is proclaiming his mission to his “home church” and to the surrounding villages. He also had his eye on Judea – always expanding his community.

We are also called to live out our faith in our community. Our faith expressions make a difference where we are. Our commitment as members of Chapelwood United Methodist Church is to support our local church with our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Jesus is our model. In Luke 3 and 4, which we have studied for four weeks now, Jesus prays, he is present to people, he gives gifts of healing and wholeness, he ministers in the home of a friend, and he witnesses God’s Good News to anyone who will listen.

As a response to these passages, take some time to prayerfully consider your commitment to God as expressed in these vows:

Prayers

Presence

Gifts

Service

Witness

P-Pray

Jesus, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Keep me prayerfully willing to follow you. Amen.

