

Sermon series, Following Christ's Call: A Journey of Transformation –  
Hear the Call  
Luke 4:14-21  
Plymouth Presbyterian Church  
St Helens, Oregon  
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The word "gospel" means "good news," but hearing good news doesn't always mean receiving it. Hearing isn't necessarily accepting, and seeing doesn't always mean believing.

Our passage for this third Sunday after Epiphany comes from Luke, where Jesus, fresh from his baptism and temptation in the wilderness, begins his ministry. His reputation precedes him as he returns to Nazareth, his hometown. The people are eager to see this local boy turned renowned teacher, hoping for a sign, a miracle like those reported in Capernaum.

On the Sabbath, Jesus enters the synagogue, and the leaders ask him to read from the Prophets. He unrolls the scroll and selects Isaiah's prophecy:

*"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."* (Luke 4:18-19)

He then declares, *"Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."* The people marvel, but their admiration will soon turn to skepticism.

## The Call of Epiphany

Epiphany is a season of revelation—God made known in Christ. We have used symbols like water to recall our baptism and light to

remember Christ as the Light of the World. But symbols alone are not enough; they must lead us to transformation. Jesus' declaration in Nazareth is an invitation into that journey.

Luke emphasizes the Holy Spirit's presence in Jesus' life more than any other gospel writer. In this chapter alone, Jesus is:

- Filled with the Spirit at baptism,
- Led by the Spirit into the wilderness,
- Empowered by the Spirit in Galilee,
- Proclaiming the Spirit's fulfillment in Isaiah's prophecy.

The people of Nazareth were seeking evidence of God's presence, yet they missed it standing before them. Why? Perhaps because Jesus' message wasn't the kind of good news they expected.

### A Message of Hope—and Challenge

The passage Jesus reads originally spoke to exiles returning to Jerusalem, a people who had lost everything. Isaiah's prophecy was a message of hope amid devastation, a reminder that God had not forgotten them. Similarly, the people of Jesus' time longed for deliverance from Roman oppression. They were eager for good news, but what Jesus offered was different from their expectations.

The gospel is good news for the poor, the brokenhearted, and the oppressed. But good news for some can mean challenge for others. The year of the Lord's favor—Jubilee—meant debts forgiven and land restored, but for those profiting from others' misfortune, it was a disruption. Justice always unsettles those in power.

We see this in our world today. Economic and social systems perpetuate inequality, and often, we are complicit. We benefit from the status quo in ways we may not even recognize. The call of Jesus is not just about hearing good news but stepping into it—participating in justice, mercy, and transformation.

## Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus

Luke tells us that all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on Jesus. What if we did the same? When we truly fix our gaze on Christ, we begin to see the world differently. Instead of focusing on divisions, we see the humanity in others. Instead of turning away from injustice, we confront it. We recognize our part in systems that harm others and take action to change them.

As Dominique Gilliard reminds us, “*There are no disposable people in the kingdom of God.*” The gospel calls us to live in a way that affirms the worth of every person. When we fix our eyes on Jesus, good news is truly good news—for everyone.

## The Journey of Transformation

Next week, we will hear the reaction of the people in Nazareth: “*Isn’t this Joseph’s son?*” Their response reveals their reluctance to embrace the full implications of Jesus’ message. But Epiphany is about revelation. As we recognize Christ’s presence, we are invited into transformation.

Jesus calls us not just to hear the gospel but to embody it—to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty and justice. This is our journey of transformation. Hear the call into it.

May we, fixing our eyes on Jesus, not simply ask, “*Isn’t this Joseph’s son?*” but rather declare, “*Look, let me show you God’s Son. Believe the good news.*”