

*“What Did He Reveal?”*

Richard W. Wing said, **“Jesus lived on the margins and moved the margins to include all people, and hence invited hostile crowds to want to edge him out of existence.”** Wing explained, “Today the church wants to edge Jesus out of our worship anytime the margins are made too wide and include too many who are not like us.” Wing continued, “Recently I was sitting at my computer, contemplating the way Jesus offended so many people so quickly in his ministry. I asked, ‘Why?’ The answer was at the top of my screen. My word processing instructions at the top read: ‘Drag the margin boundaries on the rulers.’ That is why he upset people so much: in his life he dragged the margin boundaries of race, creed, and color to include all people. He dragged the margin boundaries when he gave a common meal, which we have made a holy meal symbolic of his inclusive love for all people.” Referring to what happened after Jesus told the worshippers he had fulfilled the Scripture, Wing concluded, **“Jesus is dragged to the edge of a cliff to be put out of the lives of his townspeople because no one wants the margins of daily living to be inclusive of strangers.”** (Richard W. Wing, *Deep Joy for a Shallow World*, CSS Publishing Company)

So, what began as a positive homecoming for Jesus ended with the crowd attempting to kill him! In order for us to better understand how such a dramatic reversal took place, we need to examine more closely what Jesus revealed when he read from Isaiah. The scene was set in **verses 16-17a**, ***“Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath he went as usual to the synagogue. He stood up to read the Scriptures and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah.”*** The leaders of the hometown synagogue recognized Jesus as being someone they wanted to hear from, so they arranged for him to read from that important prophetic book. That was his opportunity to reveal his Purpose or Agenda for his life. His comment at the conclusion of the Reading demonstrated Jesus made such use of the occasion.

Ernest Hess spoke “of our current interest in clarifying our purpose in life, illustrated by Rick Warren’s best-seller, ‘The Purpose-Driven Life.’ Hess finds it ‘surprising and troubling’ that Warren doesn’t include this passage from Luke in the many passages from the Bible in his book. ‘Apparently,’ writes Hess, ‘this succinct and powerful statement of Jesus’ own purpose is not considered relevant for informing a Christian’s ‘purpose-driven life.’ (Feasting on the Word Year C, Vol. 1) And Carol Lakey Hess offers this little story from Luke as a ‘plumb line of Jesus’ teaching’ that can ‘measure our work,’ not focusing on ‘righteousness’ so much as seeking those in need and responding as Jesus would; she speaks of ‘[w]hatever we take to be the heart of the gospel’ that ‘will be the central shaping force in our life of faith’ (Feasting on the Word Year C, Vol. 1).” (As reported in the Weekly Seeds, “Good News, Good Ways/Changing the Landscape” by Kathryn Matthews)

Kathryn Matthews points out, “Indeed, our churches have spent so much energy and time in arguing over that which is not at the heart of the gospel, or that which goes against its core message, that we have squandered resources, both physical and spiritual, for preaching and living the gospel itself.” Matthews sums up, **“It’s not only justice that matters, or inclusion; it’s spiritual healing and wholeness, opening the eyes of the spiritually blind (including our own), not salvation in the sense of getting to heaven or persuading others to accept our beliefs.”**

Now, let’s look closely at Jesus’ inaugural self-definition, which he revealed from Isaiah in **verses 17b-19**, ***“He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save His people.’”***

“Kim Beckmann turns to the work of John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed (in *Excavating Jesus*) to draw this picture of Nazareth and the Judaism in which Jesus was raised to be both faithful and observant. In fact, Jesus’ inaugural address to his hometown, in which he lays down the main themes of his entire ministry, is in elegant and powerful continuity with his Jewish prophetic ancestors: **‘Jesus,’ Beckmann writes, ‘sings Isaiah’s song of good news for the poor, in the key of his mother Mary of Nazareth.’** (Feasting on the

Word Year C, Vol. 1) This is the Gospel of Luke, after all, and Mary's song, the Magnificat, back in chapter one, still rings in our ears and in our hearts." (As reported in the Weekly Seeds, "Good News, Good Ways/Changing the Landscape" by Kathryn Matthews [Huey])

Matthews responds to Jesus' statement, saying, "The heart of Jesus' message and mission, the big picture, is in this short sermon containing a few verses from the book of the prophet Isaiah but significantly omitting Isaiah's line about 'the day of vengeance of our God.' N.T. Wright suggests that this omission would have offended those first-century Jews who understandably hungered for God's vengeance on a whole host of enemies and oppressors – a wholly human longing, it seems. So it wasn't his eloquence, Wright says, that 'astonished' them but his 'speaking about God's grace – grace for everybody, including the nations – instead of grace for Israel and fierce judgment for everyone else.'" Wright knows that Jesus remembers Israel's call in the book of Isaiah 'to be the light of the nations,' and Isaiah's vision of a Messiah who 'has not come to inflict punishment on the nations, but to bring God's love and mercy to them.'" (Luke for Everyone as reported in the Weekly Seeds, "Good News, Good Ways/Changing the Landscape" by Kathryn Matthews [Huey])

Continuing with our Scripture in **verses 20-21**, "*Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him, as he said to them, 'This passage of Scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.'*"

Bill Bouknight spoke of people's responses to Jesus' revelation, saying, "We despise people who challenge our cherished myths and kick us out of our comfort zones. The truth is that when Jesus sets about the task of saving us, he has to heal us of any myth or prejudice that is contrary to the spirit of Christ. Billy Sunday was the Billy Graham of a previous generation. He was conducting a crusade in a particular city. In one of his sermons he said something critical of the labor conditions for workers in that area. After the service, several prominent businessmen sent a message to him by one of the local pastors. The message was this – 'Billy, leave labor matters alone. Concentrate on getting people saved. Stay away from political issues. You're rubbing the fur the wrong way.'" "Billy Sunday sent this message back to them: 'If I'm rubbing the fur the wrong way, tell the cats to turn around.'" (Bill Bouknight, Collected Sermons, Sermons.com)

**What did he reveal? Jesus, not only gave the revelation of his Purpose or Agenda in today's Scripture, he also lived it out!** The religious authorities and those with power were very angry with Jesus because, among other things, he kept breaking their rules – he healed people on the Sabbath, he welcomed everyone – showed Radical and Extravagant Hospitality toward the outcasts, the Samaritans, the Gentiles – non-Jews, and the "sinners". Instead of the legalism and works righteousness demanded by the Pharisees, Teachers of the Law, and Priests, Jesus showed and embodied God's Self-Giving Agape Love and Forgiveness – Grace toward everyone – even though they did not deserve it!

Unfortunately today, many Christians and churches tend to follow the example of the Pharisees and their allies, instead of Jesus. In the place of Jesus' Radical and Extravagant Hospitality, avowed Christians frequently give into the temptation of rejecting those different from themselves or whom they self-righteously judge as the ungodly.

**Jesus not only revealed his Purpose and Agenda, he gave us his Example of how we are called to live our lives and how we are to be the Church – the Body of Christ!** When Jesus told the hearers that the Scripture had been fulfilled in his reading of it, he committed himself to fulfill his own Purpose – his Identity as the Son of God – as the Embodiment of God's Agape Love. As we remember what Jesus revealed and how he fulfilled his Purpose, let us recommit ourselves to following his example of seeking to heal, set free, comfort the hurting, and live Radical and Extravagant Hospitality toward all people – even those rejected by society or the self-righteous of the religious community. God Is Still Speaking today through you and me and Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ! **God is still Loving and Welcoming us and all people! Let's live God's Agape Love and the New Life in Christ – the way of Radical and Extravagant Hospitality! Amen.**