

Road Trip: Shaped by Mission

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,
and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come.”*

Luke 4:18-19 (quoting Isaiah 61:1-2)

Early the next morning Jesus went out to an isolated place. The crowds searched everywhere for him, and when they finally found him, they begged him not to leave them. But Jesus replied, “I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns, too, because that is why I was sent.”

Luke 4:42-43

One day Jesus called together his twelve disciples and gave them power and authority to cast out all demons and to heal all diseases. Then he sent them out to tell everyone about the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick...So they began their circuit of the villages, preaching the Good News and healing the sick.

Luke 9:1-2, 6.

These text raise some interesting questions.

- What is the good news of the kingdom of God?
- What is the mission of Jesus?
- How does healing the sick embody the good news?

All these texts in Luke come before Jesus ever turns his face toward Jerusalem; they come long before Jesus announces to his disciples that he must die and rise again. So, the questions cannot be answered in terms of the death and resurrection of Jesus except that the death and resurrection of Jesus are the climatic fulfillment of what it means to preach “good news and heal the sick.” After all, the death and resurrection of Jesus are God’s Yes to the prayers “Your Kingdom Come.”

But the ministry of Jesus is also significant for mission and not simply his death and resurrection. The mission for which Jesus was sent into the world is summarized as declaring the good news of the kingdom and—to say it broadly—“heal the sick.” If the good news is not the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is the announcement of the coming reign of God and the in-breaking of that reign through Jesus’ healing ministry,

through his ministry to the poor and oppressed, through his ministry to the “outsider” in Luke.

Jesus practiced this ministry; he was apprenticed into this ministry. He took it as a mission from God and lived it out in his life. Disciples are called to do the same.

The disciples of Jesus are a missional community. The disciples take up the mission of Jesus himself. They are also to declare the good news of the kingdom and heal the sick. Jesus sent out the twelve on this mission, and then also the seventy (Luke 10). Ultimately, he sends his church.

The mission of Jesus is the mission of the church. The church discovers its mission by immersing itself in the life and ministry of Jesus. The church, as the body of Christ, continues the mission of Jesus himself. The book of Acts tells the story of how the church continued what Jesus himself “began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:1).

Healing the sick, releasing the imprisoned, freeing the oppressed—the mission of Jesus—is the mission of the church. The good news (the gospel; the evangelistic message) is not simply about saving souls but also about saving the whole person, body and soul. It is good news for the poor not only in their spiritual emptiness but also in their material poverty as the church feeds, clothes and heals.

If the church really took up the mission of Jesus in its wholeness, what would “doing church” look like? This is the challenge for the church and its mission in the 21st century—the challenge to embody the ministry of Jesus in our world and to become Jesus to our world.

Just as Jesus was sent into the world for the sake of the world, so the church is also sent into the world for the sake of the world. Jesus was blessed to bless others, and so the church--blessed with the riches of God's grace and mercy--is sent into the world to bless others with the good news of God's reign.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What was the mission of Jesus? What is the good news of the kingdom of God? (Caution: Jesus is preaching this good news long before he ever begins to tell anyone that he is going to Jerusalem to die and rise again.)
2. How was Jesus apprenticed in this mission? Was Jesus ever tempted to shift his mission or emphasis? What kinds of temptations do you think he might have faced?
3. If the disciples were sent to tell the good news and heal the sick, how does that epitomize Jesus' mission? How do we implement this mission as we follow Jesus? What does that look like?
4. What are the implications of saying “the mission of the Jesus is the mission of the church”? How might that change the way we “do church” or think about “church”?