

Can't you just imagine the reaction? Can't you imagine people leaning over to the person next to him and saying, "What did he just say? Isn't that Jesus—you know the carpenter's son?" The Scriptures Jesus read was the prophecy concerning the Messiah. In their minds, Jesus could not possibly have fulfilled the role of Messiah. They saw the man Jesus but not Jesus, the Messiah.

The people of then and we today have a difficult time looking beyond our preconceptions. Because of what we have learned in Sunday School and heard preached, we look for Jesus and see the obvious. Sometimes we need to look between what is the obvious to see Jesus. There, in Nazareth, Jesus proclaimed not only the mission of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, but also the mission of the church. Jesus challenged his people and challenges us in this church to open our eyes to see what was always there – "A Mission No One Else Can Do."

Jesus proclaimed five things he came to do; and, consequently, what he handed on to the church to continue to do. Those five callings of the church are: Preach Good Tidings to The Poor, Proclaim Release to The Captives, Help the Blind to See, Set at Liberty Them That Are Bruised, and Proclaim The Acceptable Year of The Lord. These five callings form the unique mission of the church.

PREACH GOOD TIDINGS TO THE POOR. I think we need to take a closer look at this part of our mission as the church. There is a strait forward message from Jesus – care for those in need. Those people can be next door—in our own community or on the other side of the world. Don't underestimate how important it is to be part of the ministry of a local food shelf, help out at a homeless shelter, help someone with paying for their heating, give some groceries. Those are ways that we are Jesus Christ's hands and voice to those in need.

We might ask, "What difference would my small gift make in the face of such huge needs?" Our gifts with countless others make a tremendous difference. The Presbyterian Church Women used to take the "least coin" offering – literally give whatever is the least coin in your pockets. At one time that offering amounted to over \$3 million dollars in a year. Clearly, we can not help everyone but we can help someone.

Another way of looking at this is what Jesus said, "I came that you might have life and life abundantly." Jesus also came to lift us out of a poverty of expectations about what life can be and help us to experience life abundantly.

PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES. To experience life abundantly, we need to be released. Again, we must look and see that Jesus is talking about our responsibility to thousands of people throughout the world who are imprisoned only for what they believe—for speaking out against atrocities and injustices. We are called to stand with them and work for their release.

We also know that captors are sometimes more imprisoned than the captives. Many people who are physically imprisoned for what they believe are some of the most free people in the world. So, we are not just talking about political prisoners. We need to take a closer look and see between the lines. Then, we start seeing people who are enslaved to drugs, alcohol, low self-esteem, prisoners to past mistakes, slaves to materialism and immediate gratification.

I like what I saw on a church bulletin board--WHEN YOU STOP LOOKING UP, WE START GOING DOWN. Jesus Christ came to remind us of who we are. We are children of God, made in God's own image. We can be freed by God to live life abundantly. As the Apostle Paul wrote: "If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation—the old has finished and gone, behold the new has come."

HELP THE BLIND SEE AGAIN. Again, we need to take a second look at this calling of the church. Yes, we have to admit that millions in the world today could be cured of blindness with proper medical care. When I was in Pakistan, I saw firsthand the difference proper medical care made in many people's lives. I experienced the work of dedicated missionary doctors and nurses that brought the gift of sight to thousands of people.

There is another side of this calling. Jesus Christ, working through the church, is also calling us to see the difference between deception and the truth—the difference between fantasy and reality. We are called to literally help those who are blinded because of disobedience, or any number of other reasons, recover their sight so they can be set free. One of the important ministries of this church is to offer opportunities for all of us of all ages to learn and grow in our faith. The Bible tells us to learn to rightly divide truth and falsehood. It is not easy in our world today to know what is the difference between deception and truth.

As we study God's word, meet to pray and reflect together, learn from our traditions, we can build a base from which we can divide truth from fiction, fantasy from reality. That is why Christian Education is a life-long journey.

SET AT LIBERTY THEM THAT ARE BRUISED. My friends, let me tell you there are a lot of bruised people. There are a lot of people who have been bruised by others, who have been deeply

hurt and cannot forget. There are a lot of people who have been bruised by disappointments and failures in life—by brokenness of all kind.

Healing often comes when we experience forgiveness. I am talking about both forgiveness of ourselves for what we have done wrong and forgiveness of others for what they have done to us. As one person said: “Forgiveness is releasing the captive within.” It is within a caring church family that release can come—it is here that we need to cultivate caring, love, acceptance, and real ways of helping that the bruised can be set free in Jesus Christ.

PROCLAIM THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD. Jesus was proclaiming the year of the jubilee. It is the fifteenth year of celebration, of forgiven debts and returned land, of freed servants and freedom from labor. For Jesus to assert that the jubilee year is inaugurated with his arrival is to focus on the forgiveness the Messiah brings.

The people of Jesus’ day and the people today are skeptical that it could be true. Some of the oldest and sadest words of the New Testament are recorded here: “Jesus was unable to perform any miracle here.” They echo the words of the Apostle John, “He came into the world—the world he created—and the world failed to recognize him. He came into his own world, and his own people would not accept him. Yet wherever anyone did accept him he gave them the power to become sons and daughters of God.”

My friends, Jesus came to help us to recover our true identity as sons and daughters of God. I think of this as a home coming – coming home to who we really are.

Jesus came to help us out of our impoverishment of any kind, he came to release us from our past, he came to restore our sight, he came to free all those who have been bruised and to declare we can start over again to live as free people.

As Christ’s followers, we have the same calling as Christ. We have a mission no one else can do.

A MISSION NO ONE ELSE CAN DO

Rev. Ed Morgan

Sunday, July 31, 2016

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 Luke 4:16-22

My first church out of seminary was the First Presbyterian Church of Litchfield, Minnesota. I remember vividly my first meeting with the Pastoral Nominating Committee Chairperson and her husband. I was invited to dinner at their house.

The chairperson’s husband directed my attention to a small piece of wood sitting on the mantle of the fireplace. It was a rectangular shaped piece of dark wood with small pieces of light wood glued to it. He asked me, “Ed, what do you see?” I looked at the piece of wood, believing this must be some kind of test. I only saw what was right before me. He said, “Look again.” I looked and only saw a dark piece of wood with some light pieces glued to it.

I kept thinking this must be some kind of test and I was failing. Finally, he said, “don’t you see Jesus?” That was when I practiced the art of stalling and evasion. I did not see Jesus in that wood. So, the subject was dropped. But he left the piece of wood out in plain view with the implied message, “You will eventually get this and see Jesus.”

Sometime during the evening, I relaxed enough, so that I was not playing the new pastor role. I just happened to look across the room at the piece of wood. All of a sudden things become crystal clear. I could see the word Jesus as clearly as if it were printed in bold letters. I had to look again with a different look. When I looked inside the lines rather than at the light colored wood, there it was. Jesus was there all the time, but I just could not see.

When Jesus rose to read the Scriptures in his home-town synagogue in Nazareth, the people gathered that day had a difficult time seeing anyone other than the boy who grew up in their town. The boy was the carpenter’s son – who helped out in Joseph’s carpentry shop. Even though these worshippers were impressed with Jesus’ learning and reacted to Jesus’ words with amazement, they could not take to heart what he was saying. Recorded in Luke 4:22, we hear Jesus’ words about himself, “Today, this scripture has been fulfilled.”