news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed. The spirit of the day is about proclaiming God’s favor to all who are in need. Sabbath Spirit is not the trademark of any one church, but it is a state of mind and heart.

Each of the gospel-writers describes the “good news” of Jesus in a particular way. Luke has special concern for people on the margins of society: the sick, the oppressed, the poor. Luke is the writer who speaks of God bringing down the powerful and lifting up the lowly, filling “the hungry with good things” and sending “the rich away empty” (Luke 1:52-53). For Luke, the Sabbath Spirit is felt when God’s favor is directed toward vulnerable people. God’s Spirit is personified when God’s people work for peace, freedom, equity, and justice.

Luke makes clear that Jesus comes home to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit” (Luke 4:14). By this time, Jesus received baptized by John and the Holy Spirit descended upon him. That same Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Although his ministry is just beginning, Jesus is clearly filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus confirms this when he reads from the prophet Isaiah, saying “The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me” (Isaiah 61:1).

When Jesus rolls up the scroll and sits down, the eyes of all are fixed on him. When he says, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21), he confirms that he comes to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind. His mission is to free the oppressed and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. His ministry is one that reverses expectations by directing attention to those who are usually overlooked: women, the poor, captives, the blind, and the oppressed. Such mission and ministry are at the heart of Sabbath Spirit.

In Isaiah’s prophecy, the Messiah announces that he will come and heal the damage that sin brings. Since sin does great damage, there must be a great work of redemption. Here Jesus applies the words of Isaiah 61 to his own ministry: the Spirit of God anointed him to bring liberation to those in need. First, his mission was to proclaim good news to the poor. Throughout his ministry in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus emphasized God’s care for the poor (6:20; 16:22) and the responsibility of others to care for them (12:33; 14:13; 18:22).

Jesus also came to free captives and liberate the oppressed. While Jesus did not literally break people out of prisons, he certainly freed those oppressed by sin and Satan (Luke 13:12-14; Acts 10:38). Keeping with Isaiah’s prophecy, Jesus came to heal the blind, like the blind man by the Jericho Road (Luke 18:35) or like Saul whom Jesus healed of both physical and moral blindness (Acts 9:18; 26:18).

The announcing of good news in Isaiah 61, which Jesus quotes, harks back to a theme that appears earlier in Isaiah (40:9; 41:27; 52:7). In these passages, God comforts suffering Israel with a promise of restoration. Israel will be taken captive, enslaved, and impoverished, but God will liberate and bless God’s people. This is good news of peace for God’s people, a message that God is ready still active and ready to establish God’s reign (Isaiah 52:7). By Jesus’s day, many Jewish refugees had settled again in their land, but they lived under the yoke of the Roman Empire. They still longed for God to redeem, restore, and raise Israel to her former glory. Jesus not only preached that good news, but he also embodied it: as the savior of the world, Jesus would liberate God’s people from their sins and begin the transformation of the world.

Jesus’s message in the Nazareth synagogue offers a clear challenge for us today. The Spirit empowers us to cross cultural and other barriers with Jesus’ message of compassion for people, of justice, of liberation, and of salvation. To do so effectively, however, we must be ready to go beyond the assumptions of our own nation or culture, to side with whatever God declares in this word. Jesus wants to bring his followers into unity with one another, beyond ethnic, nationalistic, and other prejudices. As Jesus’ disciples, we are appointed to carry on the mission of bringing the good news about God’s kingdom and providing care for people’s needs. We are to embody the Sabbath Spirit in our daily walk, just as Jesus did.

This Sabbath Spirit is difficult to maintain amid the pressures of life. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks encourages us to keep the Sabbath holy as a way of replenishing our spirit by connecting with God’s Holy Spirit. “The Sabbath is a focused, one-day-a-week antidote to the market mindset. It is dedicated to the things that have a value but not a price. It is the supremely nonmarket day. We can’t sell or buy. We can’t work or pay others to work for us. It’s a day when we celebrate relationships.…In the synagogue we renew our sense of community. People share their joys — a new child, a bar or bat mitzvah, an engagement, a forthcoming wedding — with others. The bereaved find comfort for their grief. We study the Bible together, reminding ourselves of the story of which we are a part. We pray together, thanking God for our blessings.”

We need this Sabbath day to rest from worldly labors, school pressures, and daily struggles. We need this time to take stock and to rededicate ourselves to God’s purpose. Old Testament professor Walter Brueggemann writes: “The Sabbath rest of God is the acknowledgment that God and God’s people in the world are not commodities to be dispatched for endless production and so dispatched, as we used to say, as “hands” in the service of a command economy. Rather they are subjects situated in an economy of neighborliness. All of that is implicit in the reality and exhibit of divine rest.”

People who are poor and captive, imprisoned or living on the margins should always be the focus of Sabbath Spirit. We see Sabbath Spirit in churches that provide help to vulnerable people instead of focusing on material success. We see Sabbath Spirit in churches that work to eliminate any physical or emotional or spiritual condition that prevents people from enjoying the fullness of life. We see Sabbath Spirit in churches that practice medicine or provide counseling or support and recovery programs. We see Sabbath Spirit in churches that provide nutritious food and clean water. We see Sabbath Spirit in churches that speak truth to power, stand up against injustice, and promote God’s healing peace in a fractured world. I hope we see Sabbath Spirit in our church, too.

Jesus ends be proclaiming “the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:19). All Jesus’ talk about good news, release, recovery, and freedom is coming to fruition right now, in this place! Jesus is not talking about good things someday in heaven; rather, God is showing God’s favor at this moment, on this Sabbath day. “*Today* this scripture is fulfilled,” not tomorrow.

The year of the Lord’s favor is nothing less than a sign of the in-breaking of God’s reign upon the world. Jesus admits, “I *must* proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God…I was sent for this purpose” (Luke 4:43). The year of the Lord’s favor is proclaimed when Christians support drop-in centers for the homeless. The Scripture is fulfilled when people of faith free the oppressed by building affordable housing. The reign of God is seen when congregations put more effort into mission than they do into building maintenance.

In Nazareth, Jesus shows true Sabbath Spirit by making a dynamic response to human need, and by showing deep concern for the most vulnerable people. Our challenge is to adopt his state of mind, and to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, healing to the sick, and freedom to the oppressed. Whenever this is done, the words of the prophet Isaiah are fulfilled, and the present moment becomes “the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:19). More important than Taco Tuesday or even Fish Friday, this Sabbath Spirit should always be alive and well at the heart of the church.

Prayer: Empowering God, thank you for anointing us with your Spirit. Give us the strength and courage to preach good news to the poor and to heal the broken-hearted. Help us to proclaim release to those who are captive and to restore sight to the blind. We pray that you deliver those who are crushed and bring them into your loving embrace. May we be vessels of your love and grace to those who need it most. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**Sources:**

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**Taco Tuesday and Sabbath Spirit**

Sunday, January 26, 2025 [Luke 4:14-21](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+4%3a14-21&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

First there was Fish Friday. This comes out of the Catholic tradition of avoiding meat on Fridays as a way of honoring the sacrifice of Jesus on Good Friday. No beef, pork, chicken or turkey; just fish. Then came Steak Saturday, an observance that goes in the opposite direction, with people enjoying a thick, juicy, grilled steak. Sunday Roast is a British tradition that revolves around a big, family meal including roast meat, vegetables, and gravy. Then there was Meatless Monday, often associated with vegetarian or vegan meals.

So, where did we get Taco Tuesday? “No one really knows who first came up with the idea of Taco Tuesday,” writes Jeff Beer. It is not rooted in an ancient Christian tradition, nor is it connected to a desire to eat a vegan diet. After some digging, Beer found a newspaper ad from 1933. The White Star Cafeteria in El Paso, Texas, invited people to come on Tuesdays and enjoy three “Mexican tacos” for 15 cents. In the decades that followed, the term appeared in ads from Wisconsin to Arizona. In 1973, a South Dakota drive-in “ran an ad with the line, ‘Stop In on Taco Tuesday.’” Suddenly, Tuesday was the day for tacos.

A decade later, things got complicated. In 1982, Gregory’s Restaurant & Bar in New Jersey registered “Taco Tuesday” as a trademark in that state. Taco John’s followed suit, trademarking Taco Tuesday in the remaining 49 states. Then, in 2023, Taco Bell pushed back. The company “filed a petition with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office to cancel the Taco Tuesday trademark across the country.” Taco Bell asserted that the phrase “should be freely available to all who make, sell, eat, and celebrate tacos.” Taco Bell won. “Taco Tuesday” is no longer controlled by Gregory’s Restaurant or Taco John’s. “Taco Tuesday” is no longer a trademark, but it is a state of mind, the spirit of the day.

The “spirit of the day” brings us to our text for today and a quest for Sabbath Spirit. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus begins his ministry on the Sabbath in his hometown of Nazareth. He goes to the synagogue, picks up the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and reads, “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 set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:16-19).

Jesus rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant and sits down. Then he says to the people of the synagogue, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (v. 21). Tuesdays may be for tacos, but the Sabbath is the day to receive God’s Spirit and work to bring good