

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

*Anointed*

## Old Testament Lesson

Isaiah 43:1-7 (NRSV)

<sup>1</sup> The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;  
<sup>3</sup> to provide for those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.  
<sup>4</sup> They shall build up the ancient ruins,  
they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities,  
the devastations of many generations.

## Gospel Lesson

Luke 4:14-21 (NRSV)

<sup>14</sup> Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup> He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.  
<sup>16</sup> When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:  
<sup>18</sup> "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,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."  
<sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

## Bible/Sermon Focus

This week, we followed the call story of Jesus back to his hometown of Nazareth, where he delivered “the shortest sermon ever written.” It is significant that Luke, and Luke alone, has Jesus preaching this sermon at the synagogue of Nazareth. None of the other Gospels include this story at all.

There is somewhat of a consensus among biblical scholars that Luke’s audience was predominantly a gentile one. They were likely being criticized for jumping on the bandwagon, so to speak, of “The Way,” the latest religious trend in the world. To reassure them, Luke makes a point to connect Jesus to a long-standing tradition.

Professor Mark L. Strauss writes, “Luke writes to confirm that Christianity is not a new religion. It is rather the fulfillment of God’s promises given to Israel in the Old Testament. Jesus is certainly the Jewish Messiah, but he is also the Savior of the whole world.” ([bibleproject.com](http://bibleproject.com))

It was very important to Luke to connect Jesus with a particular place so that we would understand that he came from somewhere. The calling of Jesus did not emerge from a vacuum. He was a part of a community, a group who raised him, taught him, and watched him grow.

Two key phrases in the story lend textual support to this idea. First of all, Luke tells us that Nazareth is “where he had been brought up.” The English phrase “brought up” is from the Greek word that means “to feed” or “to nurture.” Because Nazareth was not a large town, the people to whom Jesus was speaking would have known him as a child. They would have known his parents and known his family stories. This was his community.

The second phrase to notice is, “as was his custom.” The full sentence reads, “He went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom.” Here, Luke wants us to be sure to understand that Jesus had been to synagogue before. In fact, he had been to this very synagogue! He was not a stranger in this community that nurtured him.

And so when Jesus says, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (the aforementioned world’s shortest sermon), he is in effect giving the community credit for at least some of the person he has become. He is telling the people of Nazareth that although God is the one who anointed him to this sacred work, it came from right here. It came from you.

Each of us comes from somewhere. No one is called in a vacuum.

## Discussion Questions

1. Of the six great traditions that were mentioned in the sermon this week, which do you resonate with most fully? Which of the six is the biggest challenge for you?  
*(Contemplative, Holiness, Charismatic, Social Justice, Evangelical, Incarnational)*
2. How do today's scripture readings connect in particular with the "Social Justice" tradition?
3. Who in your earlier life helped to form you in your calling? How did they do so?
4. Would you say you have embraced your past religious life? Rejected it? Somewhere in between?
5. How do the opportunities at Manchester UMC reflect a variety of the great Christian traditions?

## Prayer

Holy God, who calls us by name, who is present with us in the wilderness, who journeys with us along our way, thank you. Thank you for the places we come from. Thank you for the places we are going. Help us to emerge from our past with your grace to guide us. And as we do so, may we support each other in our various callings, as a way to honor the variety of ways your Spirit is at work in our lives, in our church, and in the world around us. In the name of Jesus, by the power of your Spirit, Amen.

*"All of us have to do the work of dealing with our past, where we've come from, in order to move forward into our call."*