

## **“The Mission Statement of Jesus” Luke 4:14-21**

**These days, it seems like just about every group from businesses to churches, from colleges to government organizations, has a mission statement. There are experts who tell us that it is important to have a relatively brief way of spelling out just who we are and what we do.**

**When I asked my wife about her company’s mission statement, she knew it immediately. *Doing well by doing good.*<sup>1</sup>**

**I’m sure that our son Tristen is well aware of the mission statement of the United States Navy. *The mission of the Navy is to maintain, train, and equip combat-ready Naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression, and maintaining freedom of the seas.*<sup>2</sup>**

**My mother who has worked for almost 20 years at Wal-Mart probably knows their short mission statement. Wal-Mart’s mission is *“to save people money so that they can live better.”*<sup>3</sup>**

**And right here in Rowan County, you may or may not know that Catawba College’s mission statement says that they are *“committed to providing students an education rich in personal attention that blends the knowledge and competencies of liberal studies with career preparation.”*<sup>4</sup>**

**Remember the study that I shared with you last week about the only two things that almost all healthy and growing churches have in common? First, laughter is a frequent part of their worship services. And second, they have a clear sense of their purpose, their mission. There is a common vision of ministry shared by the congregation and their leaders.**

**For the most part, they are on the same page about who they are supposed to be as a church. And all the programs and activities of the church are designed as ways of carrying out that vision.**

**Having a mission statement and making sure that church members know that mission statement goes a long way toward getting everyone on the same page and working toward the same goal. Thankfully, Jesus has given us a mission statement that is hard to top.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://doingwellbydoinggood.manpowergroup.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/swmag/Pages/Our-Navy's-Mission-How-the-surface-forces-fit-in.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <http://panmore.com/walmart-vision-mission-statement-intensive-generic-strategies>

<sup>4</sup> <https://catawba.edu/about/more/mission/>

Actually, Jesus' mission statement was not something that he himself came up with. Luke tells us about how Jesus came to his hometown of Nazareth at the very beginning of his public ministry and went to worship at the local synagogue. He stood up to read from the scriptures and he chose to read from the prophet Isaiah.

He was taking these words from Isaiah as his mission statement. Using these words, he gives us a pretty good idea of who he is and what his mission is. This is what he has come to do. This is the agenda of the kingdom of God.

One business consultant explains that every mission statement should have three parts.<sup>5</sup> And the mission statement of Jesus appears to me to have all of them.

The first two parts go together. A mission statement needs to identify your target audience, your key market. And a mission statement also needs to identify your product or your service.

In other words, a good mission statement says *what*, what you are trying to do. And a good mission statement says *who*, who you are doing it for.

Jesus is really clear about the *what* and the *who* in his mission statement. His mission is to proclaim good news to the poor. Jesus has come to tell good news. Not to share good advice. Not to put on a good show. Not to present some good ideas. Jesus' mission is good news.

News is not telling people what they must do. News is telling people about what has happened or what is happening. Jesus did not come to tell anyone what they ought to do. Jesus came to tell people about what God has done and is doing. Jesus' message was not about what we can do to become more acceptable to God. Jesus' message was about how God has drawn near to the world in love.

That is Jesus' good news. And he came to offer that good news to the poor. First of all, this refers to those who have no money, no food, or no place to live. Yet the penniless and the homeless and the physically hungry are not the only ones who are poor.

The word for *poor* used here has the meaning of someone who does not have what is necessary to live. And while we do need food and water, clothing and housing, that is not all that we need to live as God intended.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mission\\_statement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mission_statement)

**We also need a sense of dignity and self-respect. We need to know that we are loved and appreciated. We need friendship and fellowship. We need joy and peace. We need hope. We need to know that we matter. We need God.**

**Without all of this, surely our lives are poorer. I think of my friends Glenn and Amanda and my late friend Madeline, all of whom have worked in campus ministry in Winston-Salem over the last 10 or 15 years or so.**

**Glenn is the Presbyterian campus minister at Wake Forest University. Amanda is the Presbyterian campus minister at Salem College. And Madeline was a Catholic laywoman who ministered at the North Carolina School of the Arts.**

**The students that they deal with each day are not usually going without food. They are students at some of the most prestigious schools in the country so money is seldom a problem. As college students, they have a roof over their heads.**

**But they are away from home. They get depressed. They feel lonely. They are anxious about their grades. They worry about the future. They worry about their families back home.**

**Some struggle with suicidal thoughts. Others need help with eating disorders. All of them need a reminder that someone loves them. They need a reminder that God loves them. That is what they need to really and truly live. That is what they need to have abundant life. Without it, they are much poorer.**

**That is Jesus' purpose. That is his mission. He comes to tell people that God loves them and has drawn near to them to give them all that they need to live and thrive.**

**Jesus also says that he has come to bring freedom to the prisoners and to the oppressed. And from the rest of Luke's gospel, we can see that this freedom appears in a variety of different ways. The same word that is used here for *freedom* or *setting someone free* is used in several other places.**

**In just a few short verses, when Luke describes how Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law who is sick with a fever, Luke says that the fever *released* her. She was freed from her sickness.**

**When Jesus prays the Lord's Prayer in Luke, he teaches us that the forgiveness of our sin is to lead us to forgive the debts of others. We are to *release* them from their debt to us.**

And several times, when Jesus tells someone that their sins are forgiven or speaks about forgiveness of sins, he refers to it as *freeing* or *releasing* people from their sins.

In two weeks, we will hear about how Jesus called his first disciples. Luke says that Peter and Andrew and James and John were *released* or *set free* from everything else so that they could follow him.

That is Jesus' mission. He came to bring freedom to the prisoners and to the oppressed. He came to release people from their debts. He came to free people from sickness of body, mind, or spirit. He came to set people free from sin. He came to set people free from whatever holds them captive and prevents them from following Jesus, from whatever prevents them from living the abundant life God wants for them.

He came to tell the powers of disease and death, the powers of sin and suffering, the powers of anxiety and addiction, the powers of poverty and pain, to let us go so that we can live fully as the children of God. This is his purpose. This is his mission.

The final *who* in Jesus' mission statement is the blind. And the final *what* says that Jesus has come to give them sight. Now, there are plenty of instances in the gospels where Jesus does heal those whose eyes cannot see.

But according to Jesus, the most blind were not those whose physical eyes could not see. The most blind are not those who need contact lenses or glasses or canes or seeing-eye dogs. According to Jesus, the most blind were those who could not recognize the presence and work of God in the world.

I remember a few years ago when our youngest child Zack and I went to a special event at his middle school. The father of one of the students at the school was quite an amateur astronomer. His hobby was looking at and studying the stars and the planets in the sky.

So the school invited him to present an astronomy night. He and a few of his friends who were also amateur astronomers came to the school. They shared a few words about their hobby and showed a video.

But the real fun came when we went outside where they had set up several telescopes aimed directly at various planets, stars, and constellations. These heavenly bodies are always there.

But like most of us, I walked around in my every day life blind to them. I never gave them a second look or a second thought until these astronomers and telescopes gave me

eyes to see them. They showed me something that I was missing whenever I looked at the world around me.

Jesus' mission is to give eyes to those who cannot or will not see. He comes to open our eyes to the wonder and majesty and nearness of God. He comes to show us what God is really and truly like. He comes to show us God's love. He comes to show us God's grace. Jesus comes as a lens through which we can see God's sustaining presence in this hurting world.

And Jesus comes to open our eyes to one another. Jesus comes to help us not just look at one another, but to really and truly see one another. To see each other as precious and delightful children of God. To see each other as sisters and brothers who are loved and treasured by God. To see that each one of us is someone with value and dignity. To see each one of us as someone created in the image of God.

The *what* and the *who* are pretty clear in Jesus' mission statement. Jesus' mission is to proclaim good news to the poor, to set free those who are imprisoned and oppressed, and to give sight to the blind.

But the last part that any mission statement needs, at least according to this business consultant, is something about what makes this mission unique. Something about why this mission is such an important mission. Something about why anyone would want to be a part of this mission and not some other mission.

What is so special about this particular mission? For starters, Jesus declares that his mission is taking place today. Jesus' purpose was not to look back to the past and reminisce about how wonderful things were in the old days and all the great things that God did back then. And Jesus' purpose was not to look ahead to the glories of heaven and rejoice in how wonderful things will be some day.

**Jesus is the Great I Am. Not the great I Was. Not the great I Might Be.**

Jesus' purpose was to show how the kingdom of God was breaking in right then and there in that synagogue. Right then and there in his hometown of Nazareth. And if we join in his mission, our mission is to show how the kingdom of God is breaking in right here and right now at Unity Presbyterian Church in Woodleaf. Right here and right now in Rowan County.

This mission statement is important because Jesus expects this mission to be carried out today. It is important because it urges us not to dwell on what happened long ago or once

upon a time. It will not let us get caught up in daydreaming about what might happen in the future.

If we are to share Jesus' mission, if this is to be the mission of his church, then our mission is to join him in sharing good news *today*. It is to join him in setting free those who are held captive *now*. It is giving the sight of God's kingdom to those among us and around us who are blind.

All of that is a pretty tall order. So thank God for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. That is the other thing that makes this particular mission unique. The Holy Spirit makes this particular mission possible.

As Jesus begins his ministry, the Spirit is with him. He is filled with the Spirit's power. And this purpose is given to him by the Spirit. He is anointed by the Spirit. The Spirit is upon him and the Spirit gives him strength and courage to carry out this mission.

This mission is empowered by the Holy Spirit. This mission is unique in that it doesn't require a big budget. It doesn't require a big building. It doesn't require thousands of people sitting in the pews. All that is needed is the Holy Spirit. The power of the Spirit is all it takes.

My former pastor, Joan Gray, served as the moderator of our General Assembly a few years ago. And she once wrote: *"When you really think about it, this power of the Spirit is the only thing the early church had going for it. It had no buildings, no budget, no paid staff, and very few members."*<sup>6</sup>

And yet without buildings, those first disciples proclaimed good news to the poor. Without any budget to speak of, Jesus and his followers set the prisoners and the captives free. Without paid staff, starting with only twelve individuals, the early church gave sight to the blind.

They took Jesus' mission statement as their own mission statement. Filled with the Holy Spirit, they continued to carry out that mission. The purpose of Jesus was fulfilled in them. May his purpose be fulfilled in us here and now. Even today.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://pres-outlook.org/2007/06/come-holy-spirit/>

