

The Gospel Of Luke

16 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, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸'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, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'²⁰

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. ²¹Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'²²(Luke 4:16-21. NRSV)

Message 1

The Holy Spirit And Ministry

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Luke 3:15-22

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Introduction:

This morning we are getting to something that has been a long time coming. Two months before Christmas we began a series called 'Preparing For Jesus'; do you remember that? It was kind of part Advent series and part introduction to this series on Luke which will now constitute the bulk of our preaching calendar for the ministry year. All of the Gospels use John the Baptist as the introduction to the ministry of Jesus, not as a narrative ploy, they do it because God did it. John was the preparatory prophet that God sent to set the table for Jesus and so we looked at his ministry and his message and this morning we'll hit the hinge in Luke's Gospel between the ministry of John and the ministry of Jesus. Open your Bibles to Luke 3:15-22. Let me read that:

15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.' ¹⁸So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people. ¹⁹But Herod the ruler, who had been rebuked by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil things that Herod had done, ²⁰added to them all by shutting up John in prison.

²¹Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' (NRSV)

We could preach on this passage for a year and we have to preach on the whole Gospel in far less than that so obviously we are not going to be able to say everything that needs to be said this morning about this massively significant Scripture. There are two themes I want to drill down on this morning and so I'm just going to provide you with some 'drive-by' insights by way of introduction as we make our way towards them.

First of all look at verse 15 again:

15 As the people were filled with expectation... (NRSV)

How many of you know that most of the great things God does are birthed into an environment of expectation? When God's people pray, when God's people CRY OUT, when God's people are wakeful and watchful and DESPARATE for the presence of God, God tends to show up in powerful and overwhelming ways. When God's people are full, when God's people are fat, when God's people are content, sleepy, distracted and assimilated God withdraws and grows distant. The Bible teaches this again and again and again. James said:

⁸Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. (James 4:8. NRSV)

Jesus said:

6 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Matthew 5:6. NRSV)

The ministry of Jesus was birthed into an expectant culture, a culture that knew that something was terribly wrong with the world and that God HAD TO SHOW UP or the whole thing would fly apart. Listen to me church, the devil would love to steal our expectancy and push us back into despondency but we will not let that happen. Surely we may stumble and surely we may fall but thank you God for the cross, thank you God for the blood; for we will rise again and the Lord will come and we will triumph, AMEN?! Amen. That's a great point but we're not talking about that this morning.

I want to show you one more thing we're not talking about this morning ok? Look at verse 16:

¹⁶John answered all of them by saying, 'I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. (NRSV)

I think I've told you before that that phrase: 'I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals' was a very powerful phrase. John was the most famous Rabbi in Israel at the time of this statement. Jesus was just getting started and no one knew Jesus but everybody knew John. John was the A-list Rabbi; Jesus wasn't even the opening act at this point in terms of public perception. In Jewish culture there was a list of what services a common Rabbi could expect from his disciples. He could expect them to pay him a stipend, he could expect his meals and travel to be paid for etc., but one thing he could not expect was for his disciples to loose his sandals. That was too menial a task and would have to be outsourced to a slave. Now here is John, no common Rabbi, but THE RABBI saying he is not even worthy to be Jesus' slave let alone his disciple. That's a MASSIVE, STAGGERING statement of humility. Church, not only does God tend to show up when people are expectant and hungry, he tends to show up when they get humbled down. Our previous standards for what is humble and what is not need to be adjusted. When we worship we don't lift God up, he doesn't move, we push ourselves down. We need more worship if God is going to show up. We need hands lifted not to change who God is but to change who we are. We need hands raised against pride, against dignity and against position. But we're not talking about that either. Look at verses 16-17, we are talking about that:

He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing-fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.' (NRSV)

This is a classic example of what scholars call Semitic parallelism. I wish I had come up with that phrase, let me tell you. What it means is, two ways of saying the same thing; two phrases that interpret each other. What John is saying about Jesus is that the ministry of Jesus is a dividing ministry.

The Ministry Of Jesus Is A Dividing Ministry

John says first that Jesus is going to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire and then he says that his ministry is going to be about separating wheat and chaff; and they mean the same thing. In the threshing floor analogy, the ministry of Jesus is going to divide people into wheat and chaff and the wheat people are gathered into the granary symbolizing the presence of God and the chaff

people are gathered for burning representing judgement and wrath. Likewise John seems to be telling us, the ministry of Jesus is going to move some people into the presence and power of the Lord by baptising them into the Spirit and some people into a place of judgement and wrath i.e. fire. Not only is this what John is saying about Jesus, this is most certainly how Jesus understood his own ministry. He was ever saying things like:

³⁴ 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶and one's foes will be members of one's own household. (Matthew 10:34-36. NRSV)

Jesus understood his ministry as a dividing ministry and we have to deal with that. Jesus is like a giant wedge, he is a log splitter, he is the rock that makes men stumble, he is destined for the rising and falling of many. When people encounter Jesus they are not unmoved. They are either pushed into the presence of the Holy Spirit or they are pushed deeper into darkness as they reject and avoid the light.

This is why the seeker church thing just can't work. Jesus is not strictly attractional by nature. A magnetic always attracts, but Jesus SOMETIMES attracts and sometimes repels. If I took a magnet and slowly moved it through a loose cluster of iron filings, the magnet would consistently act in an attractional way and would gather many filings to itself out of the cluster. Seeker church assumes that Jesus works like that. If we just waft a little Jesus over people they will gradually come into the presence of God like moths to the flame. But it doesn't work that way because Jesus doesn't work that way. He is not a magnet he is a sword. He is not an attractor per se, he is an axe. In Matthew's version of this speech by John the Baptist we get an extra verse that says:

¹⁰Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matthew 3:10. NRSV)

More division, more fire. The seeker people try and change the axe into a back scratcher. You can slow dance with a back scratcher but an axe is not to be played with. I actually thought about having someone come up to help me demonstrate this. I was thinking of having a guy swing an axe at me so that you could watch me move to one side or the other. Because that is what you do when you see an axe coming at you, you move either to the left or the right. But an axe is not to be played with and I figured if I brought someone up here and they went crowd crazy seeking the

laughs then I would end up in a coma and this service would end on time and we can't have that this morning. You don't slow dance with an axe! You don't warm up to Jesus. You either fall crushed at his feet begging for mercy and grace or you run fast the other way. That's why seeker church can never prosper, because it has to change Jesus to work. For seeker church to work you've got to dull the axe; you've got to give people more time to react. So you make the axe a back scratcher. But that changes the dynamic because you cozy up to a back scratcher and you respond with urgency to an axe and Jesus doesn't want to slow dance with you he wants you to worship him as Lord and God. When Peter met Jesus he didn't slow dance:

'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' (Luke 5:8. NRSV)

When Peter got who Jesus was he knew that a sinner like himself could never occupy the same space as God. Kind of like how we instinctively understand that our head should not occupy the same space as a moving axe. An encounter with Jesus is CRISIS, it is CATAclysm and it is CONVERSION. Woe is me, I am undone says a man in the presence of his God. Never forget church, that we bring the sword into people's lives. We do not bring peace, we do not bring ease, we do not bring friendship when we bring Jesus, we bring the sword. We bring the stone of stumbling and the rock of offence. People will bow before it and be blessed or they will walk away and be cursed and it has ever been thus.

That is the heart break of real Christian ministry isn't it? Sometimes when you take Jesus to someone it pushes them further into judgement and darkness. The more you take the cross to them the faster they run away. Sometimes it works like that doesn't it? Don't let the pain of that reality change your Jesus. He is still the rock and the stone. He is the sword and we cannot change that. Blessed be the Name of the Lord.

The Ministry Of Jesus Is Empowered By The Holy Spirit

Look next at verses 21-22:

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' (NRSV)

I told you already that there is a lot we could preach on that we're not preaching on and some of what we're not preaching on we did preach on so we are really tight for time and we need to focus. We could talk about the incredible humility in Jesus in submitting to a baptism that he did not require but we already know this about Jesus. We know that he identifies with the people he desires to reach; we just spent two weeks before I left talking about the fact of the incarnation as a fixed point in our theology that must inform everything we do. Jesus who though he was in the form of God did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped emptied himself and found himself in the form of a servant and became obedient, even unto death on a cross. Jesus walked the path of downward mobility and downward identification and we better be on that path if we are following Jesus but we're not preaching on that.

What we are preaching on is the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. There is some really difficult Greek grammar here that I want to talk about without getting distracted by. Let's deal with the phrase 'like a dove' which has given scholars and translators fits over the years. The truth is we don't really know what this means. It may mean that the presence of the Holy Spirit settled on Jesus gradually from above, like a dove settling on a person's shoulder. It may mean that the Spirit settled on Jesus as a dove, meaning you might have seen a white dove land on Jesus. It may mean that its settling on him was a sign of something, like how a dove can be a sign for peace or for Israel. Some have said that the Holy Spirit settling on Jesus was a sign that all of the promises of Israel were now 'on his shoulders'. The truth is we don't know. I think the best guess is the first one, that the Spirit settled on Jesus gradually from above. But to fill in that picture we need to deal with the next tricky phrase: 'in bodily form'. That is an approximate translation of the Greek phrase *swmatikh eidei*. The first word can mean bodily, or it can also mean tangibly or visibly. The second word means 'form or appearance.' So it may very well mean that you could physically see the effect of the Spirit settling on him. It produced a physical manifestation of presence. For help figuring this out turn to Acts 2. Jesus' life was lived out to set a pattern; Hebrews 12 says to pioneer a path, for the Christian life led by you and me. So when the Holy Spirit fell on regular Christian people, what did it look like?

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one

heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?... ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' ¹³But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.' (Acts 2:1-13. NRSV)

When the Holy Spirit descended upon the church it produced a visible, tangible effect. A real and noticeably manifestation such that on-lookers thought they were drunk. In fact drunkenness was a common analogy in the early church to the physical appearance and manifestation of a Spirit outpouring:

¹⁸Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18. NRSV)

When Jesus was baptised there was an outpouring, an anointing of the Holy Spirit upon him as upon the early church, that was BODILY, it was physical, it was observable and it was noticeably in its effect. You could watch it settle on him tangibly from above.

Now before we can use this passage we have to put it into context. To do that we have to settle what it wasn't. This was not an infilling per se, this was an 'upon pouring'. Here is what I mean: before this baptism was the Holy Spirit 'IN' Jesus? Of course it was. The Holy Spirit was in Jesus from conception. Luke already cleared that up for us in his birth narrative:

³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus... ³⁴Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' ³⁵The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. (Luke 1:31-35. NRSV)

Right from birth Jesus was of the Holy Spirit. In the Bible you cannot separate Jesus and the Spirit, the two are inseparably linked. The Holy Spirit is ever the Spirit of Jesus, as in fact it is called sometimes. So there was never a point in the life of Jesus when the Spirit of Jesus was not the Holy Spirit. So what happened at his baptism? The Spirit didn't go in him, it fell upon him. This is anointing from on high. This is the POWER OF GOD settling upon him for ministry. That is why Luke places it here – right before the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. Indwelling happens at conversion, spiritual conception, empowerment happens subsequently in the Lord's timing.

It was this way for Jesus and it was this way for the early Christians. Let me show you. Open your Bibles to John 20. This story happens AFTER the resurrection but BEFORE the ascension of Jesus. Look at what it says:

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.²¹Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, '**Receive the Holy Spirit.**' (John 20:19-22. NRSV)

So before Jesus left to go to heaven, he breathed on them and he said 'receive the Holy Spirit'. So let me ask you, several days later, after Jesus was up in heaven and the disciples are waiting in Jerusalem, did they not already have the Holy Spirit within them? Of course they did. They had the Holy Spirit within them, they were waiting for POWER FROM ON HIGH TO DESCEND UPON THEM. They were waiting for a power anointing and the one they received was visible, bodily, tangible and observable in its effects.

Much confusion and even hurt could be avoided in the church if we understood the difference between indwelling and empowerment. If you are a born again Christian you have the Holy Spirit inside you. Guaranteed. Don't let anyone tell you that you don't because you haven't had a tangible, bodily empowerment experience. You cannot be a Christian unless you have the seal of the Holy Spirit, but you may still be waiting for your power from on high. You may be waiting for a subsequent anointing. But there is not just one or two, there is always one and sometimes two, three four and more. That's why we have to keep reading the Bible when we make our theology. Those who doggedly hold that there is just one experience of the Holy Spirit and force everything they know about that into the Acts 2 story struggle to make sense of John 20 but then they also struggle to make sense of Acts 4 where it says:

³¹When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31. NRSV)

This is just two chapters after they were anointed and dumped upon in Acts 2 and now here it is again. The Holy Spirit AGAIN descends on them powerfully, visibly, tangibly and observably and they are empowered for ministry. That's three Holy Spirit experiences in just a few weeks. My point is this: all ministry in the church is Holy Spirit ministry. Everything Jesus did in Luke's Gospel was done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let me just show you a few:

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness,² where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. (Luke 4:1. NRSV)

We'll talk about this next week. Luke 4:14 says:

14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues (NRSV)

Luke 5 says:

17 One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. (NRSV)

And on and on we could go. Why does Luke emphasise this? Why doesn't he just say: 'Jesus went around doing Jesus things out of the vast store of his Jesusness?' Because we can't do that! But we can do things through the power of the Holy Spirit because we can HAVE THAT!! We can be filled with the Holy Spirit, we can be empowered from on high, we can experience outpourings of POWER to work God's purposes. That we can do.

We can do that. We have to do that or we will do nothing of value at all. That is why Paul said: 'Be ever being filled with the Spirit'. (Ephesians 5:18. My translation)

Let me just finish by explaining this once and always tension around the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I've held the full term in reserve until now because it is the source of our confusion. We get baptised once in the Christian journey. You don't come back every few weeks for another dunk. You get saved, you commit to Jesus as Saviour and Lord and we commemorate that through public baptism. One time. So we tend to think of baptism as a once and only word. But Biblically the word simply means 'washed or cleansed' and that we need multiple times throughout our lives. So is baptism a once thing or an ever always thing? Both. In that sense it is kind of like communion. The two sacraments explain each other if we let them. How many times did Jesus die on the cross? Once. But he said to do this often in remembrance of me. We do communion regularly so that the benefits of the cross can be applied afresh to our lives on an on-going basis through faith. A once for all time historical experience that is freshly and

regularly applied through faith. So it is with baptism in the Holy Spirit. When you come to Christ you are baptised into the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12 makes this absolutely clear:

¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free (NRSV)

The grammar makes it clear that we are baptised INTO the Spirit. Think of it like being dipped in strong white dye. You are now white. The dye took. You have been dipped in the dye, you are now of the dye, you are white as snow. But if you get dusty, as you will, you may revisit the dye often if you wish. But regardless, under the dust you are still of the dye. The benefits of the initial experience can be freshly applied. Here is the practical point: Jesus went back for more because we need to go back for more. The first thing was a great thing but Jesus went BACK FOR MORE. Being conceived by the Holy Spirit was wonderful but he sought out the baptism of John. The baptism of John was wonderful but he sought out the desert because he wanted to stay hungry. The desert was great but he was oft on the mountain alone in prayer, through the night because he wanted MORE!!!! Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for they will be FILLED. I want the benefits of my baptism in the Holy Spirit FRESHLY APPLIED TODAY CHURCH, are you with me on this?

We need this, for without it we can do nothing. Not by might, not by power but by my Spirit says the Lord.

Conclusion:

We are going to do communion today. We are seeking in this act the fresh application of the benefits of the cross and I go to it hungry. I am hungry for the fresh application of the blood of Jesus against my sin and inadequacy. Are you hungry church? Do you seek that with me? We have done wrong. We have stumbled and covered ourselves in the dust of the road. Thank you for the cross Lord! Thank you that its mercies are new every morning! Thank you for the blood of Jesus that though our sins be as scarlet you will wash them white as snow today Jesus! And when I arise out of that torrent today I will raise my hands toward heaven and I will seek the benefits of my Spirit baptism to be poured out afresh. Washed in the blood I will seek a fresh outpouring of the Spirit on my life. Join me there church after we have sat at the cross anew and afresh. Yawan, will you come and lead us to the cross this morning?