

Sermon: **The Inaugural Address**
Text: **Luke 4:14 – 21**
Date: **January 21, 2007**
Place: **Wrightsville First and Cedar Grove UMC**

The President of the United States is like E.F. Hutton ... when he speaks everybody listens, especially in this age of 24 hour news cycles. We listen to his State of the Union Address and News Conferences, but my favorite is the Inaugural Address. This is the place where our presidents have laid out their hopes and dreams for our country.

This is where George Washington said: *“No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than those of the United States. Every step by which the people have advances to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency.”*

FDR railed again shrinking values, higher taxes, lower income, closing markets, and the lack of family savings plans and then, he said: *“This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”* And John F. Kennedy said: *“And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.”*

Americans love that stuff. We stop and listen because we want to believe change is possible. We want to believe our lives can be better. We listen because their dreams and agendas influence our lives.

Our scripture today is Jesus' Inaugural Address! It wasn't presented to the world; but to a handful of people in Nazareth. It wasn't presented in the halls of government; but in a synagogue. Yet, these words are among the most important words ever spoken ... for in them, Jesus lays out His vision for the redemption of the world.

After He defeated Satan in the wilderness, Jesus began traveling throughout Galilee, preaching in the synagogues. And people were excited. Some even thought He was the Messiah. Then, He went to His home church, the synagogue in Nazareth, and someone asked Him to read the scripture. So, He opened the scroll of Isaiah and read these words: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* And He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the Rabbi, sat down and said: *"Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

This is Jesus' four part plan for the redemption of the world. And for generation after generation, it has been the plan that the church used to reach people for the Kingdom. Let's look at Jesus' plan.

First, we must preach the Good News to the poor! Jesus said: *"He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."*

Notice: Jesus' intention was to proclaim GOOD NEWS! When is the last time you heard good news? Nobody likes good news! Go to Sybill's this afternoon and

share some good news and then, share some juicy gossip and see which one travels faster. That's just the way things are. And there's a lot of bad news to share, isn't there? The sheer volume of human suffering is staggering, but Jesus said: "*I have come 'to proclaim good news'.*"

And this is what God has called us to do, "*to proclaim good news.*" *And notice: this good news is meant to be preached TO THE POOR.* He could have gone to the rich, but He spent His time among the poor ... because the poor are often more receptive! It seems the richer you are, the more confidence you have in yourself, but the poor understand their need for God.

Every great revival in church history has started among the poor. John Wesley preached in the fields, on his daddy's tombstone, in front of the coal mines where the ordinary people of his day gathered. And we would be wise to do the same. Our task is not to find more people like us, but to be like Jesus and reach out to the poorest of the poor, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Second, we must proclaim sight for the blind! Jesus said: "*He has anointed me ... to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind.*" One of the awesome miracles Jesus did was the healing of the blind man. I mean, is there anything that bothers us as bad as the inability to see. Yet, as we age, our sight fails and everything changes. But there is something worse than physical blindness and that is: spiritual blindness.

Now, Jesus is concerned with those who are physically blind, but He is just as concerned about those who have 20/20 vision and still can't see. He wants us to see with our eyes, but He also wants our minds and hearts to be opened to see and receive spiritual truth.

Louis was helping his daddy in the workshop one day and he said: "*Daddy, someday I want to be a harness-maker, just like you.*" His daddy said, "*Well, why don't you start now?*" And he took a piece of leather, drew a pattern on it, and told Louis: "*Take this hole-punch and hammer out the design, but be careful and don't hit your hand.*" Louis was excited, but when he hit the hole-punch, it flew out of his hand and hit his eye and he lost sight in that eye. Then, later, he lost sight in the other eye too.

And then, one day he was sitting in the family garden when a friend handed him a pine cone. And as he ran his fingers over the pine cone, he had an idea. And that's how Louis Braille created an alphabet of raised dots that opened up a whole new world for the blind.

Friends, there are people all around us who are blind. Their hearts are closed; they have no spiritual vision. And Jesus was sent to open their eyes and now, that is our task! We are to go within the church and the world, to proclaim that blinded eyes can see.

Third, we must proclaim freedom for prisoners and release for the oppressed! Jesus said: "**He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the prisoner and release for the oppressed.**" There is something in

each of us that longs to be free. A few years ago, we heard the story of Shawn Hornbeck, a 15 year old boy who was kidnapped and held captive for over four years out in Missouri. And our hearts went out to him and his family, but then, we started hearing strange reports about how he rode a bike up and down the street and surfed on the internet. And still didn't contact anybody. And we all wanted to know, *"If he had that much freedom, why didn't he just go home?"*

Friends, there are lots of people being held captive today? Some are held by fear; some are held by sinful lifestyles; some are held by negativity; some are held by drugs, or alcohol or other addictions. And all the while, freedom is within reach. Jesus came to bring freedom to everyone. The Bible says: **"Those whom the Son has set free are free indeed."**

And so, our task is to proclaim to the world that there is freedom, true freedom in Jesus Christ.

Fourth, we must proclaim the year of the Lord's favor! Jesus said: **"The Lord has anointed me ... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."** In Jesus' day, some thought God had deserted Israel, that God was mad with them and had turned His back on His chosen people. But Jesus came with a message; in fact, He **was** the message: *"God is not mad at you; in fact, He loves you."*

We are those who are favored by God. The word "favor" simply means "grace." John 1:16 says: **"From the richness of His blessings we have all received grace upon grace."** You see, God isn't a mean ogle; He is a

loving, heavenly Father who just wants to have a relationship with us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

You see, this is the season of grace; this is the time of God's favor. Jesus came to say, "*You can be blessed in me.*" And that's our message too: You have found favor with God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus said: "*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, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*"

What a vision! What a plan to have for your life! What an exciting Inaugural Address! I mean, with such a vision, the whole world is bound to bow at Jesus' feet! If only we would adopt the same vision for our ministry in the world, then the whole world would fall at the altar of the Church and seek God's forgiveness. Right? Wrong! But friends, it doesn't matter who accepted it or who rejected it, Jesus' mission never faltered and His plan for the Church hasn't changed either!

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