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Scripture: Luke 4 - Jesus Arrives

I am just back from a trip to New York City, the Big Apple. Anyone been to New York? Amazing isn't it? Carolyn and I have never been. It was on our bucket list. So, a couple of weeks ago, we hopped in the car with some good friends and made the ten hour trek to NYC. We packed a lot into our five days there. We visited all the major sites. We navigated the crowds and chaos of Times Square. We biked through Central Park, along the Hudson River and across the Brooklyn Bridge. We toured museums such as the Met, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Natural Science. We visited the Statue of Liberty. We even watch the Blue Jays get destroyed 11-0 at Yankee Stadium.

Our trip just happened to coincide with the 17th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre. On September 12, as proud Canadians, we had an opportunity to catch the Broadway Production of "Come From Away", the remarkable true story of how the small Newfoundland town of Gander embraced and welcomed hundreds of stranded travelers when their planes were grounded shortly after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. And of course, we visited the new World Trade Centre, the 9/11 memorial and the Tribute museum. It was incredibly moving to see the artifacts, the pictures of the victims and read stories and eye witness accounts of that fateful day.

We took some time in silence to step up to each of the infinity pool memorials of the two massive World Trade Towers that came crashing down that day. Our eyes skimmed the names of the casualties etched into granite bases. But between the two massive memorials was a rather inconspicuous plaque. It was located at the base of a tree. Upon closer inspection, the plaque identified this tree as the: **Survivor Tree**. And then gave this explanation:

This Callery pear tree stands distinct from the hundreds of swamp white oak trees on the memorial. It was discovered amidst the wreckage of the 9/11 attacks. Its bark charred from fires at the site and many of its limbs reduced to stumps. Yet, somehow, the tree, still bearing leaves, showed signs of life.

Recovery workers transported the tree to a nursery in the Bronx to be cared for by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. With careful tending, the stumps of burned and gnarled bark gave growth to longer and smoother branches. Replanted at the 9/11 Memorial in December 2010, this Survivor Tree bursts into magnificent blossom each spring embodying a living symbol of resilience.

As I read that description, I couldn't help but think about the message series that we launched this fall at North Park. **Foundations. Why do we believe what we believe?** It is a series about those core tenets of our faith that serve as a solid foundation on which to build our lives. Throughout the series, we have been using the imagery of a tree and its root system to represent a solid foundation. That is why we have this funky root, stump thingy at the front. It is why our graphics on the screen carry the image of a tree and its roots.

The idea is that for a tree to grow and flourish, it must have a deep root system as its anchor, just as we must have a solid foundation for our lives to have purpose and meaning. But the survivor tree at the 9/11 memorial also reminded me of resiliency, of second chances. There may be times in our lives where we get uprooted, or our world comes crashing down around us but God can take the mangled mess we have become and when replanted,

aligned with him and abiding in him, our lives can thrive. Do you believe that? Some of you know, because you have been there. Your lives, once a gnarled mess of broken dreams and promises are now vibrant and meaningful because you are firmly planted in Christ.

You may remember a few weeks, I launched this series, looking at the story of creation. When God made humanity, it was good and his intention for us right from the beginning was to rule over creation and be his image bearer to the world. We were to reflect His glory to all that He has made and reflect the praise of creation back to God. It is a foundational pillar of what we believe as Christians.

Unfortunately, not too long into the story, Adam and Eve chose to exert their own will instead of listening to God and sin entered the world. Sin in its simplest form is rebellion against God and sin separates us from our creator. That is another foundational pillar in which we believe. Sin separates us from God.

Last week, Matt opened up the pages of Isaiah chapter 53 and described that although sin is a reality for humanity, all hope was not lost. God was at work behind the scenes launching a rescue operation for us. He would provide someone, a “suffering servant” whose life would be an “offering” for our sin. This substitution, would take the punishment that we deserve for our rebellion and by doing so, restore our relationship back to God. This is a foundational pillar of what we believe as Christians. Which leads us to today, and to Jesus. Our Saviour, the suffering servant, the substitution is, Jesus.

If you have your bibles, I invited you to turn to one of the most significant passages in all of scripture and that is saying a lot because you may have noticed, there is a lot of good stuff in here. Luke Chapter 4.

Now, let me give you a little context for our passage today. In Luke chapter 1 and 2, we have the wonderful birth narrative of Jesus that we often referred to at Christmas. The angel saying to the shepherds,

Luke 2:10-11

“Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹ The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!”

Then the mass choir of angels breaks out in song, the three wise men and animals gather with Mary and Joseph around the manger on a star lit night. It’s beautiful and makes a wonderful greeting card.

In Luke chapter 3, John the Baptist, when responding to the people’s questions about whether he is the Messiah, the Saviour builds the anticipation further by saying in,

Luke 3:16

I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Then finally, Jesus breaks onto the scene and at his baptism, it says,

Luke 3:21-22

the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descended on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.

It is the inauguration of Jesus’ public ministry. Soon after, he is led in the desert to be tempted by the devil, but he withstands the evil one’s deceptive ploys and returns to the area he was raised filled with the Holy Spirit’s power. People are beginning to notice him and good reports are being spread about him and his teaching.

That is where we find ourselves in Luke 4. Isn’t it exciting?

I love this section of scripture. Jesus is on the cusp of something great. He brings hope for better future for the people. He is the hometown boy that has made good. He is the Phenom. The next best thing. There is a lot of buzz circulating about him and what he can do to save his people.

Now, let me stop there. If you know me at all after almost 6 years, you know that I often use modern day stories to help illustrate what is going on in the bible. It is a teaching technique. Can you think of any story that made the news around London this week that would be similar to what I just described?

Someone who brings hope for better future for his people. He is the hometown boy that has made good. He is the Phenom. The next best thing. There is a lot of buzz circulating about him and what he can do to save his people. Anyone know about a story like this circulating in the local news this week? Oh, you just knew that I would have to sometime in this message talk about last Tuesday night in Lucan, didn't you? Does anything ever really happen on a Tuesday night in sleepy ole Lucan? This past Tuesday was different. For one night, it became the centre of the hockey universe when Kraft Hockeyville brought the Toronto Maple Leafs and Ottawa Senators to town. It was John Tavares' debut in a Leaf's jersey. The hometown Phenom has returned to save his people and restore glory to the franchise. This is a pretty good analogy for what is happening in Luke 4, wouldn't you agree? Except Jesus was never paid \$11 million a year!

But there would have been a similar sentiment around him as there is for Tavares amongst Leaf Nation this week. There was hope that he could bring a better day and save his people. Jesus had preached and taught regularly in the synagogues and he was given rave reviews but now he returns to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home and to the synagogue he was raised in. There was much anticipation of what he would say and teach about. That is where we pick up the story. I want to read the account in its entirety first and then we will break it down a little bit.

Luke 4:16-21, just listen to this, let these words flow over you. Put yourself in the scene.

Luke 4:16-21

When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,

for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come." He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"

Boom! Mic Drop!

Did you catch the significance of this moment in the synagogue? You can bet that those seated in the pews most certainly did. Through his words and actions, Jesus had created a buzz, a stir. Just like John Tavares performance on Tuesday night in Lucan, two goals and an assist. He had announced something with that performance. People were talking about him.

Referring to Jesus, *Luke 4:22* says,

Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips.

Amazed by his gracious words, and presumably his poise and maturity. Wow. But then there is this snap back to reality moment when the crowd realizes,

Wait a minute...

"How can this be?" they asked. "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

This man standing before us and declaring all of these incredible things, that's Joseph's son, he's the son of the town carpenter. That is the shy kid that used to run through these streets, all arms and legs, tripping over his feet. Nice enough kid, helping the neighbours with their gardens, milking the goats, attending the local Jewish school, and now what is he, 30? Where does the time go?

I understand how they are feeling, the older I get. This past summer, I ran into a kid my son used to play hockey with. The last time I saw him he was 11 years old. He was not a bad hockey player but a bit goofy and kind of dense like most 11 year-old boys.

When he was eleven he had messy hair with frost tips and was usually dressed in a baggy Waterloo Wolves track suit. Do you know where I ran into him? At a funeral home. He recognized my name as I was officiating at a funeral and he introduced himself. Here he was eleven years later, all grown up. He could look me right in the eye. He was clean cut, freshly shaven and wearing a crisp suit and tie. He explained to me that he was training to be a funeral director. I was stunned, *Jacob, when did you go and grow up? The last time I saw you I think you were eating paste! Now, look at you, a funeral director.* I sat back and shook my head in disbelief as I observed the way that he handled himself with such maturity and professionalism.

How can this be? Perhaps you have had the same feeling, as you have watched those awkward kids around you grow up to be fine upstanding citizens.

But with Jesus, take this a step further. In this moment, Jesus, now a mature man of around 30, strides to the front of his hometown synagogue, the place of worship where he was raised and he stands before those who have known him most, if not all of his life. The leader hands him a scroll. It was the reading of the day which would have been part of the Jewish service liturgy. The reading was from what we know today as the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. Jesus unfurled the scroll and selected the passage he was going to read very deliberately. There was an intentionality to what he was doing. In quoting this passage from Isaiah 61, Jesus is summarizing his identity and he is publicly declaring his mission.

Isaiah 61

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."

He then rolls up the scroll, hands it back and goes to sit down. Maybe we don't grasp the significance of those words as we sit here today, but for the audience before Jesus on this day, when he spoke of *captives being released, the blind seeing, the oppressed being set free, about the time of the Lord's favour*, these words would have triggered all sorts of recognition and memory for the Jewish

people of this day. They had heard these phrases often, *releasing, seeing, freeing, forgiving, letting go, restoring*. These are words that are associated with the Messianic hope. These are words that they one day, hoped that the Messiah, the Saviour of the Jewish people would utter. And now, the kid from the hood is declaring them. With every eye in the place locked on him, Jesus states,

"The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"

You are living witnesses to it, I am much more than Joseph's little boy! The spirit of the Lord is upon me. I am the Messiah!!

Can you imagine? This is the day that the Jewish people had been waiting for centuries. That God would send someone to save them. Just think, any Leafs fans out there, it has only been 50 years since the last championship, that we have been waiting for a Saviour. Can you imagine waiting and longing for one for over 400 years? But the key phrase for understanding all that Jesus is getting at in this text is found in,

Luke 4:19

the time of the LORD's favor has come.

This phrase, the *time of the Lord's favour* refers to something called, Jubilee in the Old Testament. Are you familiar with the concept of Jubilee? Exodus, Deuteronomy and Leviticus in the Old Testament all describe this ideal of Jubilee. Let me explain. I think we are familiar with a weekly cycle of six work days followed by a Sabbath.

That has gone by the wayside in our culture today with Sunday shopping but Sundays used to be a day of rest from the work week. A Sabbath for just about everyone. Those of you who are under 30 may not remember it, but Sundays used to be when everything shut down, except for church.

I know it is hard to fathom now that there once was a time when you couldn't just whip into Sobeys if you forgot something for the Sunday meal or pull into a gas station and fill up your tank if you were running low on a Sunday. Things were closed. It was a day of rest modelled after the creation story in Genesis when God took a break from creating on the seventh day.

But in the Hebrew calendar of the Old Testament didn't end there. With one day a week. There was also a rhythm of working for six years and then in the seventh year, taking a break. It was called the sabbatical year. Some of you have had the pleasure of being able to take a sabbatical from your workplace for rest and rejuvenation. That was the purpose of this sabbatical year every seven years in the bible. But it didn't even end there. After seven, seven year cycles, 49 years, in the 50th year, there was what was called a year of Jubilee. These sabbatical and Jubilee years provided a rhythm of life for the Israelite people in the Old Testament but they also created a bit of social upheaval. Things were turned a little upside down during the year of sabbatical and the year of Jubilee. Why?

Well, there were three major God ordained shakeups that happened in this culture every seven years. The first shakeup:

1. Not only were people given a break every seven years but also land was given a vacation. In the Sabbatical year, soil was given a rest, a break. No crops were to be planted or harvested. Any random plants that popped up were left for the poor in the seventh year.

Now you can imagine for an agrarian society that was wholly depended on the land for their food, this was a big deal. There was huge potential for hunger and death from starvation. But God had promised his people a plentiful harvest in the sixth year to cover year seven so they had faith that God would provide. These were His laws so He would provide.

In the 50th year, the year of Jubilee, something even bigger happen in regards to the land. It was returned to its original owner. Can you imagine? Land that had been bought and sold for 49 years, on the fiftieth year, it was returned to the one who had originally owned it. Some of you are old enough to remember that first house on that property that you owned fifty years ago, you know, the one you purchased for \$12 000! If we were in Old Testament times and this was a year of Jubilee you would get that baby back. How do you like that? The shag

carpeting, pick bathrooms, green fridge all of that would be yours again! But there was a purpose behind this practice. It prevented greedy land barons from swooping in and buying up all the prime real estate at the expense of the poor. And it ensured that once every generation, land would be returned to the original owner.

The second major shakeup every seven years in this culture:

2. Slaves were released. Slavery was not uncommon in biblical times. That is why you see a lot of references and slave language in the bible. People were familiar with it. In that culture, you were either a slave or owned a slave or at least knew someone who did.

Slaves were a highly valued possession and a major source of productivity. They worked everywhere, from private households to farm fields. They also worked on governments projects such as roads, aqua ducts and civic buildings. Slaves were often prisoners of war. They could have been sailors sold as slaves by pirates or slaves brought from outside territories or they were criminal slaves. The criminal slaves were the ones that did the real grunt work in this society. They did the mining. They were shackled ship oarsmen and they were the ones that provided the violent entertainment for the masses, the criminal slaves became the gladiators. It also was not uncommon for desperate citizens to raise some money to pay off debts by either selling their children or themselves into slavery. In the seventh year, the sabbatical year, the slaves were released from their debt and obligation to someone else and set free.

The third major shakeup every seven years in this culture:

3. All debts were forgiven and erased in the seventh year. The IOU's were torn up. Now before you get too excited and think, *Wow, we should do that in our culture today. I would have my student loan erased, my credit card debt forgiven and my line of*

*credit wiped out. That would be amazing.
Or...*

Every sixth year, I could go on a cruise, do a house renovation or buy a new car because the seventh year, it's all wiped out. That's the way you were thinking, right?! That is not the kind of debt people accrued in this day. Debts were mostly charitable loans to needy people. Every seven years, desperately poor people had the hope of starting over with a clean slate, no debt. Everything was forgiven.

So, just a quick review of what the seventh year Sabbatical and 50th year Jubilee were all about in the Old Testament of the bible.

-Land was given rest and every 50 years returned to the original owner

-slaves were released

-debts were forgiven

All three of these things represent a shakeup in the culture but they also represent good news especially for those who were poor and there were a lot of poor in this society.

Jubilee presents a beautiful picture of forgiveness and redemption. That a new day and a better and hopeful future is possible. Can you see that?

Let's jump back to Luke 4, Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth, his hometown. Listen to his words again:

*"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,
and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."*

There is a very literal meaning to Jesus' words here but there is also a very deeply theological nuance as well.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me. This was a messianic announcement. With these words, Jesus is stating, the Messiah is here, I am He. Salvation is dawning, the Kingdom of God is near. It is no longer far away in the clouds somewhere. God's presence has broken through, right here and right now. It is all happening before your eyes, through me.

And here is my mission, I have come to bring good news, the gospel to the poor, to those not living the kind of rich, abundant and purposeful life that God always intended humanity to live. I have come to declare that those who are enslaved to someone or something will be released. I have come to declare that those who are blind, those living in darkness will see a brighter future. I have come to ensure that those oppressed by the weight of a debt, that it will be forgiven and you will be set free.

Jesus' sermon in the synagogue, the reading of Isaiah 61, and its link to the meaning of Jubilee declares that through him, the Messiah, things will be forgiven, redeemed and returned to their original state. And through his words, we get images of paradise, don't we? His words bring to mind a place or condition where there will be no more debt, no poverty and no slavery. A new and brighter day is on the horizon.

Those are images that take us back to the garden, back to Genesis and creation. By bringing to mind this year of Jubilee, the year of the Lord's favour, Jesus gives hope that he is going to bring it all back together again. He will restore the world back to the original garden, back to perfection, back to when... IT WAS GOOD.

Just as that Survivor Tree in the 9/11 memorial, all but destroyed by the evil and devastation around it, but it was loving brought back to flourishing life, replanted on a firm foundation. Restored and redeemed.

Jesus, the Messiah has come to the world, to let us go. Forgiving our debts, cutting the chains of sin in our lives, opening our eyes. This is true Salvation, this is liberation. This is the gospel. This is the grace of God in action. Freely giving humanity something we don't deserve. All we have to do is receive it. Turn from the way that we have been living and turn back to Jesus, rekindling our

harmony with God and our place in His family. Our lives rooted in Him.

How do we respond to this good news proclamation of Jesus in this passage of Luke Chapter 4? Are we awed and amazed just like the people in the synagogue? Is this gospel a foundational pillar in which you believe? Seems like a no brainer doesn't it?

I don't know if you have had a chance to skim the rest of the story in Luke Chapter 4. At first, the reaction to Jesus words in the synagogue were met with a favourable response.

Luke 4:22

Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips.

But the tide turned rather abruptly. Just a few short verses later it says in,

Luke 4:28-30

When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious. Jumping up, they mobbed him and forced him to the edge of the hill on which the town was built. They intended to push him over the cliff, but he passed right through the crowd and went on his way.

Jesus' hometown went from praising and being amazed by his words and actions to actually taking him out to the edge of a cliff and attempting to toss him over! What happened? You thought Maple Leaf fans were fickle. Hero one day, scapegoat the next. What is going on here? What did the people hear from Jesus that made them so angry?

Inclusivity. They heard inclusivity.

In the text from Luke 4:23-27, Jesus went on to suggest that the salvation that he had come to offer was not just limited to the Jewish people but it was for everyone. Those gathered around Jesus on this day just couldn't handle it. This is not what they wanted to hear. They wanted exclusive favour. They wanted the hometown advantage.

They thought the Messiah was going to come and condemn and pour wrath and destruction on their enemies and save only the Jewish people. But with his declaration, Jesus is stating that his salvation, his good news proclamation is for everyone who

receives it. No matter how lost, how enslaved, how blind they are. This hope is extended to the whole world.

This lavish grace is Jubilee. It is the favourable day of the Lord. The day of liberty and the day of salvation. It is Jesus of Nazareth who articulates it and embodies it in his words and his deeds and, it is available to anyone. All we have to do is come to him and receives his offer of new life. It is available through him. Have you done that? What are you enslaved to, today? What are you indebted to? What are you blind to? Jesus has come to set you free.

It is a foundational pillar in which this church believes. Is it what you believe? Have you received all that Jesus has to offer and have you built your life upon his firm foundation?

Amen? Amen.

Let's Pray

Points to Ponder

Foundations: Why We Believe What We Believe

Luke 4 ~ Jesus Arrives

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Describe a time in your life when you felt like everything was crashing down around you. What was it that kept you grounded? What was the foundation of your life that allowed you to pick yourself up and start again? Have you ever felt like you didn't have a foundation? Describe what that feels like.
2. Define the term 'gospel'. Share some of the different definitions for gospel that you have been taught in the church. Is this "Good News" that Jesus shares in Luke 4, different than what you have understood the gospel to be? If so, in what ways?
3. Do you take a regular day of rest, a Sabbath each week? If so, what do you usually do on that day? Describe what brings you rest and rejuvenation. If you don't take a regular Sabbath, what is it that stands in your way?
4. Read Luke 4:16-21 with your group. What do Jesus' proclamations of *captives being set free, the blind will see, the oppressed will be set free*, mean to you and your life?
5. Have you experienced Jubilee in your life? Have you received the good news that Jesus has proclaimed in Luke 4? If so, how has it changed the way that you live?

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray specifically for one another that this series on Foundations would strengthened your faith and your relationship with Jesus.