

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
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Jesus Outside the Lines: God in the Other | Luke 4**

When I was just starting out, there was a famous professor who said, “When you’re telling the story remember that first words set the tone for everything that’s going to come next. First words set the tone, but last words are lasting words. Last words are meant to last and to stay with you.” So, this morning I would like to look at Jesus’s first words and Jesus’s last words, both of which I feel are outside the lines. In the story that Luke tells about Jesus’s life, he really gets going in chapter 4. It’s after Jesus’s birth and baptism, after His time in the wilderness, and in this chapter, Jesus is ready to start going public. This is what it says in verse 16:

<sup>16</sup> He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read...

That means that this was the custom of Jewish synagogues at the time. If there was a distinguished guest, a visitor from out of town, or a new rabbi, they would walk over and give them the text for the morning.

<sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: <sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

That’s the Jubilee year, when all the debts get wiped away.

<sup>20</sup> Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. <sup>21</sup> He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” <sup>22</sup> All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.

<sup>28</sup> All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.

[Luke 4:16-22; 28]

As far as we can tell, after being rejected Jesus never returned home to Nazareth again.

First words in Luke are about who Jesus is—the Spirit of the Lord is upon me. And everybody who follows Him Jesus calls to go outside the lines to preach good news to the poor and give sight to the blind...to rescue the captives. It’s important to notice that the first thing Jesus does when He goes public is to teach. Teaching has always been

right at the center of the life of the church because people are taught so many things outside that in many ways we need to teach and reteach inside. He says, "The spirit of the Lord is upon Me to preach and to proclaim and to talk about the year of the Lord's favor."

We're in the middle of Lent. For a couple of thousand years, the church used the time between Ash Wednesday and Easter to change things up, so Lent would be a season of special days of prayer. Lent was the time when people would fast or give something up to change their usual life. Lent was also a time when the church designated a special thing that people could give alms to, but always Lent was a time of special teaching, of learning about Jesus, and so we start with Jesus teaching. It's about instruction; you learn something. It's about a call to choose between two ways. It's an invitation to do that now. It's never a coercion. He could have hypnotized everybody and said, "Go out like robots", but He wants to give you a choice.

What's so offensive about Jesus' first sermon? Actually, it's not His teaching. Jesus is not booed because He's a teacher. He's quoting the Old Testament. It says, "Their eyes are fixed on Him." Jesus is in trouble because first He gets up and says, "I am the answer to your prayers. Today this has been fulfilled. I am the One you've been praying for. I'm here." And second, Jesus is talking to the people that He grew up with. These people have seen Him grow up, and He's telling them *You're just bad off as the naked. You're just as pitiful as the ones who are in prison. You're as out of luck as the naked. Grace needs to come to you and you need to show that grace to other people.* He says, "It's not like you people need to learn something, you need to do something." It says, "And they were amazed at His words of sheer grace, but they were not pleased." They were amazed, but not pleased because the Jews thought they were the special ones. They were on the inside looking at the outsiders, and Jesus is saying *the Spirit has called Me to go outside, to bring everyone in, especially those people who are hungry at the door, the ones you keep talking about because they drink too much or they swear, they never go to church, or they cheat. Especially for the poor.* I think it's really important not to romanticize poverty by thinking *Oh, the poor are so lucky, they're close to Jesus.* I think the poor are often cursed and abandoned by rich people. Don't romanticize it. But in the stories of Jesus in the Gospels, it is always the unlikely ones who respond and the good people who turn away. Jesus is saying *it's the poor in spirit who need Me. It's the poor in wallet who come to Me. It's the poor in reputation who want a second chance because they know they're in trouble.*

Sauls's book, *Jesus Outside the Lines*, has a section in it where Scott talks about poverty and he says, "We need to learn from the Christians in Ghana. The Ghanaians, when an American comes to visit them, always start by saying, 'Welcome, our American friends, welcome to Ghana where we have joy because we need Jesus more.'" We have joy because we need Jesus more. You've got plenty of credit cards, we need Jesus. And that offends the Jews that Jesus told, and frankly it sort of offends a lot of

Americans. The key to understanding the start of the story, the key to understanding Luke 4 where Jesus starts his journey, is in a question. The question is: *Who does He think He is?* Who does He think He is to tell us how we should live? Who does He think He is? It's going to come up five more times in the Gospel of Luke. They were all amazed at the miracle and they said, "Who is this guy? He forgives sin! Who can forgive sins? He calms the storm. Who is this man?" Jesus asks, "Who do people say that I am?" Only two people get it right. One of them is Peter. Remember? We talked about Peter last week. *I think You're the Messiah. You're the one we've been waiting for.* The second person who knows who Jesus is is Jesus himself, but you don't find that out until the end of the story. If Luke 4 is the start, Matthew 25 is the end, and I'm going to insist today that what starts in Luke 4 ("The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to go out") ends in Matthew 25. It's not a pop quiz, it's the final exam outside the lines. So I'll ask you, because this is so important, to take out your Bible and turn to Matthew 25. This is the part of the story where Jesus has died. He is risen from the dead, He goes to heaven, and He's telling what's going to happen at the end of time when He comes back for what is called a judgement story. Last words. Let me start.

<sup>31</sup> "When the Son of Man comes in his glory (this is what Jesus calls Himself), and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. [Matthew 25:31-33]

What do you think that would look like? I don't know what that would look like to separate sheep and goats. I think chickens are born in those little plastic wrappers with little feathers on them, but if I'd grown up with shepherds around, I would hear it differently. Keep the Bible open. I want you to hear the next part of the story from somebody who knows what a shepherd looks like.

[Video Shown]

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/2i3vygzpim75k4y/Matthew25\\_EventPromo\\_Final.mp4?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/2i3vygzpim75k4y/Matthew25_EventPromo_Final.mp4?dl=0)

(watch until the 1:04 mark)

And the King will say to them, "Come into the feast!" And then the King will turn to the people on His left and He'll say, "I never knew you. Go away." Maybe the most sober part of the Bible . . . "Come on in!" or "I never knew you. Go away." I want to make sure that you don't ever forget that you heard this and so I would ask you to underline two phrases in this verse. You want to know how to be a sheep and not a goat? Underline these two things. First, underline this phrase: when did we see you? *Well, if I would have known it was you I would have handled it a little different! When did we see you?* And then circle Jesus's answer: the least of the sisters and brothers of mine. You believe that or you want to believe it, but are you living it? The Jews who were in the synagogue with Jesus believed it, but were they living it? I don't often say this, but this is about life and death. This is about judgement and salvation and to the ones on His left, He will say, "I never knew you."

So, some of you I'm sure are saying under your breath, *wait a minute, in this church you're always talking, John, about being saved by grace. We believe in Jesus, we trust in Jesus. Isn't that just believing in Jesus?* Well, I think that the end of the story here shows us that believing in Jesus has to go from the head to the heart. Do you see Him? Not just do you believe it, but do you see Him?

I came to Jesus at the end of high school, started college, and ended up transferring from a state school to a small college in Chicago. The first winter that I was there—I was a sophomore—the football coach volunteered a bunch of us to go into the city down to Skid Row in Chicago to serve breakfast at a shelter. Got up about 4:00AM, got on the first train to Chicago, got down there and it was freezing cold. That bitter Chicago wind was zipping through the streets. We were cheap so we walked from the train station down to Skid Row, only there because the coach told us to go. We were walking down Rush Street and up ahead we saw 3 or 4 policemen on the other side of the street. We wanted to see what was going on, so we walked towards the cops. They were at the edge of the street and as we get closer we saw a body on the street and it was covered in a blanket. It was the first dead person I'd ever seen; I was 19 and hadn't seen a dead body before. As we got closer, it became clear that this was one of those Skid Row bums who knew the tricks of the city. One of those tricks was that if you didn't have a place to stay inside you went outside to lie down on one of the city grates—hot air blows up through the grate and it gets trapped in your blanket and you don't freeze. You see it all the time in the cities, and this guy was so drunk that he fell asleep and, in his sleep, rolled off the grate and froze to death. He literally froze to death and the only thing that showed outside the blanket was his frozen hand. Well, none of us had seen that before and we stared for a long time. When we started to walk down toward the mission, I kept looking back. I realized over the days and weeks that followed that the reason it grabbed me so much was that I could have been seeing my mom. My mom drank too much. That blanket could have covered my dad. There were times I would bring a blanket over to the couch and put it on my dad because he fell asleep there and all of a sudden it became personal.

And they'll ask the King, "When did we see You?" "Well, you saw Me every time you saw these brothers and sisters of Mine." The poor are not projects, they are children of the King. And the key is not do you believe what you read in the Bible, like the Jews did in Nazareth. They believed it, but do you see them and do you value them? Do you value them?

We talk about values all the time. Ruth Haley Barton says, "Values are just nice sounding ideas. Do you value them? They're just nice sounding ideas until we have practices that help us live those values in concrete ways." I believe all kinds of things, but what do I really value? Values fall apart when there are not concrete practices that help me see them. It is so hard for us as Americans, as the American church, to really understand the struggles that our brothers and sisters face all around the world and frankly even across the street. We have brothers and sisters across the street who are

struggling, but they are so good at hiding it that we don't see it. How do we really know what it's like to go hungry or not to have safe water? How do we really know what it's like to flee our homes in the middle of the night with just what we can grab because you can hear the bombs coming toward your house? I think if you are going to see the least brothers and sisters you need to practice seeing. And so, I'd like us to practice today. I'd like to practice all week with you, so that you pass the test of time.

We have these cards today. This is Matthew 25 day-by-day for a week. It says, "I was hungry", do you know what that means? I was hungry. Well, if you want to see the hungry, why don't you skip lunch on Monday and break your fast Monday night with rice and beans. "I was hungry." Tuesday . . . "I was thirsty." On Tuesday, why don't you give up all the drinks you usually drink instead of just water? "I was a stranger. I had to run for my life." Well, how about if you slept on the floor Wednesday night and as you tossed and turned you would think about people who have to do that without a choice. I'll tell you what, if you do this, I'll do this. On Tuesday night you can text me and we'll talk about how we're sleeping, and each day of the week, there's a chance for you to live out Matthew 25, the challenge, so that you can see what it's like. If you do that, if you take the Matthew 25 challenge, you will see Matthew 25 differently. Let me share with you the experience of a couple of people who did it.

#### MATTHEW 25 VIDEO

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/2i3vygzpim75k4y/Matthew25\\_EventPromo\\_Final.mp4?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/2i3vygzpim75k4y/Matthew25_EventPromo_Final.mp4?dl=0)

(Start watching at 1:04 mark)

This week I'd like us to become a Matthew 25 church. We're not handing this out in Sunday school so the kids would make their parents do it, although we should have thought of that. But I'd say to those of you guys up there in high school, it would be great if you would do this and freak your parents out by asking them to do it with you. If you do this as a family, if you do this with a friend, if you do this with your small group (I'm going to call my small group and say, "Let's do this together."), think what we could experience. Head and heart together. I hope every single person will take this challenge this week.

We can do this together. Now, here's the deal. You're going to be tempted sometime this week to opt out if you miss one of the days. Don't do it! Stick with it. Do your best. This has the potential to change your faith, but only if you take it seriously, only if you stick with it. I think this can change us. What if hundreds of you, hundreds of us, did this together and talked to somebody else about the impact this had on our days? Imagine how it could deepen our love for God and for God's children together. Let this go from your head to your heart so that when the King looks over at you and says, "Welcome into My paradise because you fed the poor and clothed the naked and visited the prisoner", you'll say, "When did we see you?" And you will have seen Him. And more than that, you'll see Him around the table here. When I come around the table I think of Andrew Natsios. He's not a household name. Andrew Natsios was once the director of

USAID—the part of our government that gives away foreign aid. During a public hearing Natsios was asked, “Dr. Natsios, why do you want to be the head of the USAID?” And Natsios spoke for me and I bet for you when he said, “I believe that my calling is to take the hand of the poor who are at risk and put it at the hand of the rich who are at risk and put them together so that God can bless them both.” I believe that the rich are in deadly peril and the poor are in deadly peril and that God wants to bless them both. That’s what Jesus talks about in Luke 4. And then the King will invite all of the sheep from every town and every tribe of the world around the table and He will say, “Eat my body broken for you. Drink the cup of salvation for you, and together we will eat and drink.”

Lord Jesus, I thank You that You made us uncomfortable so that we would live real life. I pray that You will give us eyes to see the least of Your brothers and sisters whether they are across the street or across the world. And I thank You that no matter how I screw up, Your table is always filled with room for one more. Feed us with grace and love. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*