



Sermon for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany, January 23, 2022

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10](#)

[1 Corinthians 12:12-31a](#)

[Luke 4:14-21](#)

Their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message to the ends of the world. (Psalm 19:4)

God's blessings, friends. Welcome to St. Luke's here in Coeur d'Alene. Today we continue following Jesus in his early adult life and ministry. Today, in the Gospel of Luke, we hear Jesus declare his purpose and paint the picture of all that he will do and teach.

Today we hear Jesus' declaration. This is Jesus' declaration.

Jesus has stood up and said what he is called and compelled to be for the world.

Jesus has said, "This is the call of God. This is what we have been waiting for. And this is what I am here for. I am here to fulfill God's vision and purpose. This vision is now going to start being fulfilled and is already fulfilled by your hearing it."

What is your declaration?

God invites each of us. God makes a declaration to each of us in our births and in our baptisms – "You are my beloved child, I delight in you." And God invites us in time to make our own declaration. "This is what I am here for. This is what I am about. This is what is important for me to be and do."

Your declaration is never just your own invention, out of thin air or out of just your own whims and ambitions and desires. Your declaration of purpose and calling in life wells up from everything and everyone that has shaped you over your lifetime. It wells up from your being named, claimed, known, and embraced by the God who knows you more deeply than you know yourself, who helps you see who you are. It arises from all the people and places that have shaped you.

Jesus' deep sense of calling and profound sense of purpose didn't come from nowhere. We began this season following the Epiphany with Jesus as an adult, stepping into the waters of baptism. We begin with God's declaration to him – a declaration of unbelievably close and tender love. We begin with Jesus being claimed and embraced. "You are my Child, my Beloved. I adore you!" Jesus was immersed not just in water but in the fiery warm embrace of God that enfolded and engulfed him. We come next, this last Sunday, to Jesus with his mother at a wedding celebration – a festival celebrating the committed love and adoration of two people to one another and the joy of lives joined together. And Jesus' experience of being claimed and embraced so fully is mirrored in this joining of two lovers in the bonds of marriage. Although he is not ready yet to begin his ministry and to make his declaration, he follows his mother's lead and lets the generosity of his love flow out into the celebration, extending their joy with new and excellent wine from the huge jugs of purifying waters – as Deacon Glenda reminded us last week, gallons and gallons, cases and cases. This is just a sign of how the power of God's love will flow through him into the world.

And then, there is the part we skip over in our readings until we come to the season of Lent, but it is one of the next things that happen after Jesus is baptized. Jesus goes into the wilderness, into some solitary time of wrestling and seeking clarity. Jesus knows he has been claimed and called – but to what, and how? Jesus already has a sense of what he is called to be and do, from his mother's words of her own declaration that we call the Magnificat: to

lift up the lowly and cast down the mighty, to scatter the proud in their conceit, to feed the hungry with good things. And we know he has been in deep, soulful conversation with God all through his years of growing up and stepping into adulthood. But he seeks fuller clarity. And part of seeking fuller clarity is naming and setting aside distractions, recognizing and refusing alluring temptations.

Jesus returns from wilderness and sets out from wedding feast with a clear vision of what he is called to be and do for the world. And he begins to speak it. He names what he has taken into his heart and mind and gut as his purpose. They are old words, from long before he was born – and they have become his words.

This is Jesus' declaration.

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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:17-19).

It is clear. Jesus names the things he will do – bring good news, declare release, set free, give sight, name God's acceptance and delight. And Jesus names the people who will be the focus of his calling – the poor, the captive, the blind, the oppressed. He is for those who have no one for them, who are bound or restrained or cast to the side. And remember, it is possible to be poor, captive, or blind in ways that are not physical or directly visible.

Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing it (Luke 4:21). Get ready – it has begun, now! And you are part of it beginning!

What incredible boldness. It's almost brash – like that old baseball moment when Babe Ruth points to the stands where he going to hit his home run. And then, everything we see in Jesus' life and ministry is fulfillment of these words, in all he did and taught.

What is your declaration? Each one of us, at whatever point we are at now in our lives – and callings and purposes change over the course of our lives.

What now is your declaration?

How about us, together? What is our declaration, as St. Luke's?

Over this last year, our Vestry has been making space for God to speak. We have taken time to reflect on why we follow Jesus, why we are part of a church community, and why we are a part of St. Luke's. We spent a rich time of retreat with each other back in early October, letting ourselves think, pray, and discuss together our responses to several questions.

Here are those questions. I invite you to think about these questions yourself, as you consider our life, faith, ministry, and witness together at St. Luke's.

- Who have we been at our best, as a church community? When was that, who helped make it happen, and what was the result?
- Where do we find ourselves now? What world do we find ourselves in, here in Kootenai County and north Idaho at this time?
- What are we hearing as false or mutated presentations of the Gospel? How does St. Luke's understand and proclaim the Gospel differently? What makes us distinct as followers of Jesus?
- What might God be calling us to, in this world around us now?
- What is St. Luke's capable of doing next? What will we be like at our best, addressing the world around us?

Our Vestry sat with these questions, shared our thoughts with each other, and at each stage went deeper and deeper in prayerful deliberation. We collected our thoughts at that retreat, and then over the next months let ourselves distill and clarify a way of expressing what we were learning about our calling and purpose for now and the coming years here in north Idaho. We were able to make a declaration for St. Luke's in a vision statement and mission statement.

Here is our vision:

To share, celebrate, and embody Jesus Christ's overflowing, unconditional love in north Idaho.

Here is our mission:

To cultivate life-giving relationships in Christ with all, through deliberate discipleship, courageous conversations, purposeful partnerships, and authentic action across north Idaho.

Hear these, read these, again. Let them sink in. We are a church who will share, celebrate, and embody the unconditional love of Jesus. And we will do this by fostering life-giving relationships with each other and with all people we meet. And the way to foster these kinds of relationships is by inviting each other into purposeful following of Jesus, entering and inviting bold and caring conversations, seeking partnerships that make a difference in people's lives, and acting with integrity and clear purpose in our communities.

You will find this in print in our annual report next week. You will find us talking about this. You will find us as a community thinking about our vision and mission, letting it guide all we learn and practice and plan and put into action. This is our declaration!

Beloved, each one of you... What is your declaration?