

# “What You See, Might Be All You Get!”

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## Scriptures: Isaiah 61:1-21

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God...

Luke 4:16 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, 17 and 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, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 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. 21 Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

## Sermon:

In today's passage, Jesus is calling us to a radical new way of looking at things.

But he is also challenging us to perceive all of reality in a radically different way.

Jesus is encouraging us to try and see things the way God wants us to see them!

But in order to do this, we must revisit some of our conventional understandings.

To gain new perspectives we usually say that we must first, "open our eyes" to either gain a wider perspective, or at times, to be more focused.

To more closely zero in on what might be hidden, or to a reevaluation of old assumptions that now no longer square with new information.

Now my focus this morning will be on two verses, 20 and 21 of this passage where the Good News version describes the scene at the synagogue with *"All of their eyes were fixed on him."*

The NIV renders it this way, *"the eyes of everyone ... were fastened on him."*

But the translation I like the most, is from the Scholars Version,  
*“and the attention of everyone was riveted on him.”*

Anyway, whichever you prefer, I would encourage you to just try  
and imagine the scene? Have you experienced anything like it?  
A moment, seemingly suspended in time and space,  
where every eye, everyone’s full attention is laser focused  
upon a single person or event?

No one is looking at their watch or checking their cell phones.  
No multitasking as one eye looks out the window  
or is peripherally wondering where their child might be.

How did Jesus manage to command such attention?  
After all, all he did was read from the scripture.

How often have you been left motionless by the recitation of scripture?  
If not then, maybe we should recite it differently?  
Or perhaps, maybe we should be listening differently?  
And maybe Luke is just taking advantage of his license as the author  
to use a bit of hyperbole to catch the reader’s attention?

Whatever the case, most scholars point out  
that those in attendance would have been quite familiar  
with that very popular text from Isaiah.

It was so familiar, in fact, that every listener would have  
quickly taken notice, particularly of what Jesus did NOT read.  
It was after all, for Jews such as them living under brutal  
Roman oppression, the best part.

But by failing to deliver all that was usually expected,  
Jesus changed the focus and reinterpreted that popular passage.

I wonder if we have any baseball fans here today?  
Well, in common baseball parlance,  
Jesus had been going through his wind up  
and is now ready to send the heat!

But rather than a fast ball down the middle of the plate  
it was more of a curve ball or perhaps a sinker  
that suddenly dips before reaching the plate.  
The audience was waiting for the pitch; swing, and a miss - steerike!  
and the ball lands harmlessly in the catcher’s mitt.

This is the reason why I had both passages read this morning.  
So did you “catch” his curve ball?  
Did you “hear” what Jesus dropped from the passage?  
That’s right , the promise of “God’s vengeance!”

Now this passage from Isaiah was likely written  
sometime during the forced exile of Jews in Babylon.  
And for people living in that context, the desire for vengeance  
against one’s oppressors would be certainly understandable.

But it was also grounded in the belief that Yahweh was a just God.  
And as a just God, Yahweh would one day balance  
the “playing field” and reverse the fortunes of rich and poor.

For the oppressed it is always a challenge to keep the faith,  
to keep one’s hope alive that God has not forgotten you.

And if we continue reading further in chapter 61,  
Isaiah gives powerfully poetic voice to this promise.  
*“Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall till your land and dress your vines;  
but you shall be called priests of the Lord, you shall be named ministers of our God; you shall  
enjoy the wealth of the nations, and in their riches you shall glory.”*

For those listening to Jesus, who live in that real world  
of brutal Roman occupation, they too are hoping for, longing for  
God’s age old promise of “just deserts” to be fulfilled.

But because they were looking for the wrong thing,  
because they read the pitch incorrectly, they missed it (steerike one!).

By stopping where he did, Jesus is calling them  
to a different vision of what God’s way of justice really is.

Jesus was not denying that God will come to save the world,  
but what Jesus is trying to make clear, is that when God does arrive,  
God will not be dressed in military camouflage to kill, destroy  
and ultimately force the other side into capitulation!

And that God’s justice then is not vengeance that merely replaces  
those on top with those who were on the bottom!  
God’s justice will be radical change and a total reorientation  
of our world where everyone is equally valued.  
True justice will be based upon reconciliation, restitution,  
communality and sacrificial service to one another.

I don’t know about you, but I find that pretty compelling, even riveting?!

But the game is not over yet there in the old ballpark in Nazareth and Jesus is going into his wind up again for another pitch.

Now that he has the undivided attention of the crowd he takes a seat to deliver his homily (you see that's how they did in those days). I can almost hear that brittle old lamb skin cracking as he rolls up the scroll and hands it back to the scribe.

But when he did finally speak, he gave only a nine-word sermon!  
*"Today this scripture has come true as you listen."*

I'm not quite sure, but you all might be just as dumbfounded if I ever gave such a similarly short sermon?!

But to keep the whole baseball metaphor going this time Jesus did send the heat, a fast ball right down the middle. And what a fastball Jesus had, "quicker than light" some said!

Likely still dazed from the first pitch, that fast ball was already in the catcher's mitt, before anyone knew it - steeriike two! Jesus is The prime example that only sacrificial love and service can bring about God's way of justice! John called him The Word, or Logos, the Divine Creator's best and clearest communication of Divine purpose.

And as Son of God, Jesus can provide daily sustenance and hope via continuous and living relationship that keeps us connected with God.

It is so long past the time to put aside the point of view that Yahweh is God of vengeance and violent retribution!

But Jesus wasn't stating anything new, numerous prophets before him had also said similar stuff;  
*"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Micah 6:8*

But Jesus is also now boldly claiming that he is also more. That he is the enfleshment or the incarnation of God and that he is the way to make what is true reality in heaven the same reality down here on earth. Of course I would encourage you to check in next week when we will look at the verses that follow to see just how popular that message was in his day and how well it was actually received by those hometown folks back in Nazareth!

*“The Spirit of the Lord...to bring good news to the poor... to set free the oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord’s amnesty!”*

It is happening right now folks! God is here and  
God’s heavenly rule doesn’t have to be put off until some other day.  
The next pitch is coming, will it be steerike three or outta the park?!  
I guess it mostly depends upon whether we keep our eye on the ball  
or not?!

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