

“A Blueprint for Disaster”

Luke 4:14-30

Series: Follow Week 2. Blueprint

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Heglund

The Woodside Church

September 29, 2019

They say, “You can never go home.” In May, 1999 I received a great blessing. When my friend and colleague Jeff Ebert was called to be the senior pastor of my home church in New Providence, New Jersey, he invited me to preach at his installation service. For me it was a return to holy ground. At the age of 13, I opened the door of my heart to Jesus there. I first heard the call to serve the Lord there. I preached my first sermon there. My son Peter was baptized there. I knelt on the steps in the sanctuary and was ordained there. So when the invitation came, I moved heaven and earth to be there.

During the week before the service, I called the office to tell them the title and Bible text of my sermon. I must confess I felt a twinge of pride returning home as the special featured preacher. When I identified myself the voice on the other end of the line said, “Doug Heglund? This is Mrs. Edwards.” The secretary in the office was my former high school health teacher. Suddenly I reverted to an awkward freshman. Now think for a moment about the content of your high school health class. Mrs. Edwards was a lovely, kind lady who taught us, in a very matter of fact way, the mechanics of reproduction. Of course, teachers hope their students will understand and apply their lessons, and Mrs. Edwards was no different. Despite my being a pastor, she was not at all embarrassed to ask if I understood and applied her instructions. I kid you not: the first question she asked me was, “Doug, did you ever have any children?” Sheepishly I replied, “Yes, Mrs. Edwards, I did exactly what you taught me.” Sometimes it’s humiliating to go home.

It can also be downright dangerous. It was for Jesus. In the first week of Follow, Jesus is baptized by John and anointed by His Father to begin His mission as the Messiah. He receives two gifts for His ministry – the power of the Spirit and the pleasure of the Father. Before He does a single thing, His Father says, “You are my Son, my Beloved. With you I am well pleased.” God gives the same to all who follow Jesus – the power of the Spirit and the pleasure of the Father. You are God’s Beloved. This is a crucial place to start and a vital message to share with others. Someone who heard the sermon sent me a picture of how we can share this message with all who pass Woodside. It is a picture of three statues on a church lawn: Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker and Jesus. On the sign in front of them, Jesus says, “No Luke. I am your Father.”

After His baptism, Jesus returns to Galilee on fire – the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. (Luke 4:14-16)

Much, but not all, of Jesus' preaching and teaching takes place in synagogues. What is a synagogue? It's a Greek word meaning "assembly." Like the word "church" it originally referred to the people who gathered and only later applied to a building. Several synagogues from Jesus' time have been excavated. These may be places where He preached. Typically they are a room sounded by benches with pillars. Synagogues in Jesus' day are somewhat different than those today. For example:

1. A Synagogue is not a Temple. Though your Jewish friends may say they are going to Temple these are two different buildings. There are many synagogues but only one Temple in Jerusalem which was destroyed in 70 AD. The Temple is for sacrifices. Synagogues are for reading God's Law and teaching His commandments.
2. Originally Synagogues do not have Rabbis. Later, rabbis will be leaders of synagogues but in the first century laypeople can teach the Law as Jesus and Paul do.
3. At first, Synagogues were not places of worship and prayer. This develops after the Temple is destroyed. People gather to learn how to follow the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus' preaching tour of synagogues around Galilee receives rave reviews. Finally He returns to His hometown. Nazareth is a tiny village. Scholars guess there are only 40 to 50 homes. Built on a hillside overlooking the Jezreel Valley, Nazareth is not mentioned in the Old Testament. It may be a settlement of Jews who, like Joseph, moved up from the Jewish homeland in the south. So, it might be a new village, and new villages need builders. Joseph and Jesus are each called a "tekton" which is often translated as carpenter but is probably better rendered as craftsman or builder. Jesus spends the first three decades of His life laboring in the family construction business building stone houses, animal barns and maybe even the town synagogue. So Jesus knows how to follow a building plan. Today, however, He rolls out an entirely different blueprint.

The buzz about Him is spreading like wildfire. The question is whispered everywhere: is Jesus the Messiah? Will He choose their humble village synagogue to reveal His true identity? Will He present the blueprint for His Kingdom? Every eye is riveted on Jesus as He carefully selects a passage:

He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Isaiah 61:1-2)

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. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)

"So it's true," the people murmur, "Our Jesus *is* the Messiah, God's Anointed King." Using the ancient prophecy of Isaiah, He describes what His Kingdom will be like. He

does not call for an army to rally behind Him. He does not issue warnings to Herod Agrippa, Pontus Pilate or Tiberius Caesar. He does not condemn the Jewish Council. His focus is not on the high and mighty, but on the lost and lowly, not on the center of power but on the fringes of society, not on the rich and famous but on the poor and nameless.

Jesus kicks off His kingdom right here in His hometown. When a politician launches a campaign or celebrates a victory they do so in their hometown. Here they lay out the goals of their government, the blueprint for their administration. When kings are anointed, at their coronation ceremony, they declare how they will rule. This is what Jesus does in His hometown synagogue. He unrolls His blueprint for the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. It is essentially a message of freedom: freedom from poverty, slavery, imprisonment, blindness and oppression. We tend to separate physical from spiritual. We divide between physical poverty and spiritual poverty. Jesus never does. He frees from both. He feeds stomach and spirit. He heals body and soul. How do we follow His blueprint? We are to tell Good News and do Good Deeds. He wants to free us on the inside so we can go outside and free others. Let's scan Jesus' blueprint from two viewpoints: how it frees us and how it frees others. Let's look at how this applies to you.

Good News for the Poor – The word *poor* literally is crouching in fear. It means to be helpless and powerless. Where do you feel helpless and powerless? What habits hold you down? What fears fence you in? What obstacles block your way? Where could you use God's help? Where do you feel empty and need God to fill you up?

Freedom for Prisoners – This is a hostage held captive by a spear – a prisoner of war. What is holding you hostage? Overwhelming desires on the inside? Unreasonable demands on the outside? Are you in a losing battle to save your marriage, your child, your health, your job? What POW camp do you need God to unlock and let you out?

Sight for the Blind – The original meaning is smoke blocking your view. Is someone using lies and deception to throw a smoke screen in front of you? Are you using denial, justification, rationalization to blind yourself to the consequences of what you are doing? In what way do you need God to open your eyes?

Release for the Oppressed – This means to break or shatter into pieces. How have you been shattered by disease, rejection, abuse, trauma? Do you see yourself as broken, useless, unloveable? Are you oppressed by guilt and shame? Do feel beyond repair, beyond salvation? What pieces do you need God to put back together?

Receive God's Grace – Last week we learned each of us is God's beloved. How can you let God love you? Listen to God's voice of love instead of the voices of comparison, criticism or condemnation. In what way do you need to receive God's grace?

This is the blueprint for what Jesus wants to build in you. It sounds great!

That's what the listeners in the Nazareth synagogue thought...at first.

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. (Luke 4: 22)

Can you imagine their pride? ‘Our little Jesus is going to be the Messiah.’ ‘I always said he would be great someday, didn’t I Gertrude?’ ‘I was his first grade Sunday school teacher.’ The leader of the synagogue is thrilled at least one kid in his confirmation class was listening. Their pride swells so big they almost can’t get out of the synagogue. But the next thing Jesus says bursts their bubble:

Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’” “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.” (Luke 4:23-27)

Translation: my Kingdom is not just for Jews. It’s for Gentiles too. The people in the Nazareth synagogue see themselves as the poor, imprisoned and oppressed. They believe God sent the Messiah to save them *from* the Gentiles. They never dreamed God intended to save the Gentiles. The chapter from Isaiah, which Jesus read, says they will be on top.

Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed. Isaiah 61:5-6, 9

The Gentiles we serve will serve us. The taxes we pay the Romans they will pay to us. When we cry for justice we really meant just-us. Jesus’ plan is a blueprint for disaster.

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (Luke 4:28-30)

Jesus’ hometown tries to kill him. They say it takes a village to raise a child. In this case, it almost took a village to kill one. They wouldn’t be the last to try.

What drove them to destroy one of their own? Selfishness – pure and simple. It’s the one sin which underlies all the others. Selfishness is putting my self first above everything else. Every segment of our society wants to puff your ego up. In a thousand different ways, the culture feeds your selfishness. Look better. Feel better. Get ahead. Be first. You need it. You’ve earned it. You deserve it. Ultimately, selfishness is self

worship. It pushes God off the throne of your life so your ego can take His place. In fact, someone has said EGO stands for Edging God Out.

The American Dream urges you to do all you can, so you can get all you can, so you can impress all you can. We've even created a nice, middle class, American Jesus. We made Him in our own image. He comforts us but never challenges us. He blesses us but doesn't bother us. He gives us every good gift but doesn't ask us to give anything. We've turned the church into a religious mall that offers entertaining worship services, high quality children's programs, edgy over the top youth groups with plenty of free parking. We even think Jesus is sitting up in heaven with a self-esteem problem desperately hoping someone will accept Him as Lord and Savior.

Since this Follow series is about meeting the real Jesus, now is a good time for me to introduce Him to you. He does not care about popularity. He does not change His message to attract people. Some of the things He says are so hard many turned away from Him, turned against Him, tried to kill Him as they did in Nazareth. He destroyed their Jewish Dream. They thought God only loved them and wanted to make them number one. Jesus says, "God loves you and the world too. You are God's first – the first to go out and reach the world." They forgot a crucial verse in Isaiah 61:

And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. Isaiah 61:6

Priests are mediators, bridge-builders. God blesses Israel not to bask in the blessings. God blesses Israel to bless others. All that freedom on the blueprint is for others too.

This is how it works: you receive the freedom as you give the freedom. You can't keep freedom if you don't give it away. The surest cure for selfishness is service. What can you do to bring good news to the poor, freedom for hostages, sight to the blind, putting back the broken pieces of the oppressed, pouring out God's grace? This is not going to be easy. You will get hot, dirty, sweaty, cold and tired. You will have to go to places like Haiti, the DR, the Bahamas, Kensington and Trenton. You will need to give up some soccer games, video games, Eagles games ("Now you've gone too far preacher"). You will face rejection when you share your faith or invite someone to your growth group. Your growth group will prove it is more than a Christian book club by doing a mission project or launching a new growth group. You will have to give up time and money you would rather spend on yourself. You will have to stop asking, "What do I want?" and start asking, "What does God want?" Setting people free is not easy. But I promise you, the rewards are out of this world. How do I know? You proved it to me.

I thought, "There is no way we can do this in a day." How can 135 mostly unskilled volunteers of all ages build and raise up the walls of an entire house in a single day? Yet on June 1 the lumber was cut and stacked and you people of Woodside and other churches poured in. You sang praises and then put the whole thing together. And you did it before noon. How did we do it? We didn't. God did it through us – through good leadership, through many groups working together and through one more thing. On every header and footer they stapled a portion of the blueprint. The plans were built into

everything we did. At the end, when they stood inside their house, Damian and Joanne, the future owners said, “This is a blessing from God.”

Jesus’ hometown congregation almost killed His blueprint.

Let’s be the congregation that builds on His blueprint.