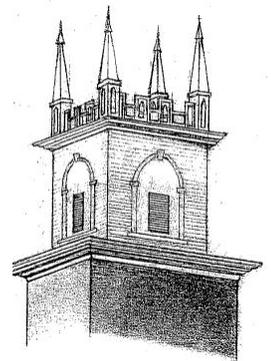


+ **N.E.W.S. CONNECTION**

Pittsford Congregational Church
United Church of Christ
121 Village Green
PO Box 570
Pittsford, VT 05763



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Message from the Pastor

Each week our Sunday readings and homily are video-recorded for those with computer access. In turn, the same message is made available through Rutland PEG-TV on the following Sunday. Still, that message does not reach everyone. From time to time, I will share a Sunday homily transcript with you. Here in edited form is the message from the pulpit on Sunday, January 23, 2022.

GOSPEL TEXT: LUKE 4:14–21. Words from Scripture in bold text.

What is Good News? Besides hearing it within this morning's Gospel, when did you hear it the last time? Hint, back in the late 60s, there was a new translation of the Bible, readily available in paperback, called *Good News for Modern Man*. That choice of a title reminds us that Gospel is a translation of the words good news. Roll it back into Latin, and it is evangelium, from which we get evangelist and evangelize, and within the original Greek, (yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on), lies the word angelos, recognizable to us as angel, but it first meant messenger. For news to be news, it has to be communicated; it has to be disseminated, or better yet, for our purposes, it needs to be proclaimed.

Good news or evangelism is nothing to be tepid about. We don't whisper our faith. Do we go around softly saying, "I am a Christian?" How do we speak publicly about who we are? Some folks who haven't seen me in a while will ask, "Aren't you retired?" No, I am not. I am a pastor now. How's that for getting revved up again? Perhaps for some of us, the word evangelism has been tinged by showiness and glitziness of television spectacles.

What a Gospel message to proclaim this morning! We need some background to remind us of what has taken place in previous chapters of Luke's Gospel. Jesus has been baptized by John the Baptist, with the Holy Spirit descending on him, with a voice from heaven saying, "Thou art my son, and with thee, I am well pleased." Then Jesus withdraws into the desert, where he is tempted by Satan. He perseveres through that ordeal. Now, he is ready to launch his public ministry in his home turf.

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. The Temple was in Jerusalem, but communities of ten families had a synagogue where the community gathered to worship and pray. A synagogue service had three parts: worship, where prayers are offered; reading of the scriptures, and teaching. Jesus took this opportunity to both read and teach.

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, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "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."

Of course, Jesus knew well how these words were loaded with meaning. The prophet Isaiah had railed against empty gestures. Isaiah de-emphasized ceremonies, rituals, and displays of righteousness. Instead, Isaiah emphasized human compassion and social justice. Who most needs our attention? In Nazareth, Jesus directly challenged those who thought they knew him best, the community of his childhood. Once Jesus sat down, he proceeded to deliver questions that shook his audience to the core. That is next week's Gospel.

This Gospel is a keystone in the entire ministry of Jesus. Herein lies the essence of the Good News. Jesus draws upon the power of the Holy Spirit to empower his ministry. Remember that Jesus had no building, no paid staff, no committees, no membership list. We have all of those things: a building that requires our care and maintenance, a budget that needs to be justly conserved and used, and committees that have important duties. How do these structures move us forward? How do they make real the Good News? What is our call to action, and when will we do it? If we all continue to be transformed by the Good News, then that transformation must be manifested in our actions. We all have different parts to play—being here for worship is one of those acts that binds us together. Some of our members may no longer be able to be present physically with us on Sunday morning, but they are still a part of us, and we continually need to reach out to them. Our ship must continue to move forward, driven by the wind of the Spirit and with all oars in the water. By oars in the water, I mean we cannot allow anchors to be thrown overboard to keep us stuck in the same place.

Think of those actions verbs that Jesus quoted from the prophet Isaiah.

How do we **bring** Good News? Speaking the message of the Gospel does not belong to me alone. Together, we bring light and hope to a dark world.

Whom do we **release**? We can break the shackles of loneliness and isolation to those that feel imprisoned.

How do we **heal**? We comfort the afflicted and be present to those who suffer in mind, body, or spirit.

How do we let the oppressed **go free**? Opportunities abound for us to speak up for justice and fairness.

And lastly, we have the opportunity to **proclaim** the year of the Lord's favor. When we hear the words of this Gospel message, it is time for us to press and hold down that reset button. It seems everywhere we go today, someone wants us to complete a survey. How are we doing? That is a good question for all of us to ponder as we contemplate how we allocate our time, our talent, and our treasure. But remember, bringing the Good News, or more formally evangelization starts one person at a time.

Michael F. Dwyer, Pastor