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January 18th, 2026

Luke 4: 1-30

Sermon Title: Prophet for the Oppressed

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The Testing of Jesus

4 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.” 4 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’ ”

5 Then the devil[a] led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil[b] said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8 Jesus answered him, “It is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,

and serve only him.’ ”

9 Then the devil[c] led him to Jerusalem and placed him on the
pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God,
throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,

to protect you,’

11 and

‘On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

12 Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to
the test.’ ” 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed
from him until an opportune time.

14 Then Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding region. 15 He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

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 set free those who are oppressed,

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.” 22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” 23 He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” 24 And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months and there was a severe famine over all the land, 26 yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 There were also many with a skin disease in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” 28 When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 29 They got up, drove him out of

the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. 30 But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way. (This is the Word of God)

Please pray with me...

Introduction:

On Monday, Jan. 19th, we will celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day. I am so glad we have this holiday. It reminds us of one of the most influential leaders of the 20th century who continue to greatly impact the movement of nonviolence, peace, and justice today.

Have you ever thought of the similarities between Jesus and Martin Luther King Jr.?

Both were prophets, both identified with the poor and oppressed, both sought justice for the marginalized, both taught love your neighbor and even your enemy.

Both experienced deeply the love of God and were teachers and preachers who faced opposition from religious and political leaders.

Both were killed for their faith and convictions, while they were still in the thirties. Jesus was likely 33 and Martin Luther King Jr. was 39.

Both also led movements that continue to impact the world long after their deaths.

Of course, Jesus inspired MLK Jr. deeply and King also developed his values from the wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi, Howard Thurman, and his father Martin Luther King who was a pastor before him. Both Rosa Parks and King's wife Coretta Scott King helped shaped his vision and heart.

I have studied King's life for many years and what I want to highlight related to our Scripture passage today is that King went through his

own leadership journey that mirrored the experience of Jesus is some ways. King was ordained at 18 years old as a Baptist preacher. He received his bachelor's degree at Morehouse College and went on to get a doctorate at Boston University. He married Coretta Scott in 1953 and would later parent four children with her. He had his first major pastorate at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church of Montgomery, Alabama. In 1955, the bus boycott of Montgomery started with the help of Rosa Parks, challenging the segregation practices of the South. King helped lead the boycott and eventually joined the pastoral team of his father in Atlanta and dedicated his energy to supporting the movement of liberation led by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which he founded in 1957. We remember that King marched on Washinton in 1963 with more than 250,000 people, he won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and worked tirelessly until the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964. King sought to broaden his work for peace and economic development throughout the world. He spoke out against the Vietnam War and championed the

Poor People's Campaign to support human rights and economic development.

When he died, similar to the prophet Moses, he was hoping for the day when he and others would enter the promised land of peace and justice for all. King had a huge impact in only a few years of leadership. For King, his activism was rooted in his faith. He had a moral compass shaped by the teachings and story of Jesus.

Like Jesus in the wilderness, King went through times of temptation and struggle. We know King was not a perfect man, but his legacy lives on through his commitment to love. Here are three well-known quotes of King about love.

"I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear."

"Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

"Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend."

What King and Jesus both taught that is so critical today is that love of God, neighbor, friend, and even enemy are key in the movement of peace.

King and Jesus were both prophets of love.

In our Scripture today, Jesus says,

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,

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19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Friends, if you are looking for a good definition of the gospel, the good news of Jesus. Look at this passage and the sermon on the mount. Jesus is quoting from the Prophet Isaiah and he is announcing his own work as a prophet of love.

If you have gone to a memorial service at our church, you may be aware that I often ask the question of what the person who goes to heaven would want to say to us at their memorial.

I might ask that question of Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesus as well. I imagine Jesus and King might say together in unison...

Friends, let love be the purpose of your lives.

Love everyone and especially identify with the poor and oppressed.

Join in solidarity with them. Work for human rights, equality of all

people, education, and peace for all. Avoid any form of nationalism.

Instead, be a citizen of the whole world. Be a champion of peace and nonviolence and work to end war and violence in all its forms.

King and Jesus would say don't just look to us as prophets of love.

Become love in the world. Become prophets yourselves as you remind people to care for one another.

Celebrate diversity and never discriminate based on color of skin, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or any other distinction that people use to oppress others.

Friends, do you notice that in our Scripture story today, Jesus says that a prophet is not listened to in his own land. Jesus has to flee because they try to take him out even before he gets started. They try to throw him off a cliff at the beginning of his ministry.

The sad reality is that prophets will face persecution. Even prophets of love will be challenged with hatred and judgement.

Right now, in our country we are once again seeing regular protests about the plight of immigrants and the behavior of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, also known as ICE. Knowing King, he would try to bring ICE agents and the immigrant community together for honest dialogue and relationship building. He would try to address any unlawful behavior done that fosters violence. He would work with legislation and government leaders and would base all his actions on his own spiritual convictions about love.

We need as a church to join movements of love in the world that support those who are oppressed. We all need to be prophets of love in some way. We need to care for the immigrant community and build relationships with ICE Agents and government leaders in a way that ends the practice of detaining innocent people. We need to be prophets of love in our homes and in our streets, in our schools, and in our work places. We need to remember that our nation is a land of immigrants. We are advocates for refugees and asylum seekers and

we work to stop corruption when it occurs. We need to follow Jesus who is our friend and we need to remember the contributions of King and others.

One interesting side note about both Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife Coretta Scott is that they were both artists in some way. Coretta was a singer. There are recordings of her singing with her church choir. Martin Luther King Jr. was an artist with words, and his sermons had a type of cadence that was musical. In Black preaching there is a musical style where you start slow, get warmer, catch fire, and then cool down as you preach. King was an artist with words and a musical preacher in that he had a poetic style that flowed like a song.

As we work for peace and justice in our world, as we sing the song of love that drowns out the hate that pervades our nation and world, may we not lose hope. May we join the voices of prophets of the past and present as we remember lives lost for the cause of justice, as

we remember the oppressed. Friends, we shall overcome some day,
but it will take a commitment to following Jesus and a commitment
to becoming prophets of love in our world. Let us pray...