



Isaiah 61 – Jesus’ Mission Statement

Introduction:

Wesley College’s mission is based on the mission of Jesus Christ. Join us as we explore further Jesus’s mission statement in Luke 4, the Old Testament scripture he referenced from Isaiah 61, and how Jesus’ vision has been carried out at Wesley College.

Presenters:

Rev. Bonface Wanyama is an ordained pastor of the Kenya-Ethiopia Annual Conference and the head of theology at Wesley College. He has been at Wesley College from the very beginning and has been instrumental in moving the college forward to where it is now.

Rev. Eric Soard is an ordained clergy from the Memphis Annual Conference and served over 10 years in Tanzania with the United Methodist Church. He founded Wesley College in 2017 and is living in the US working as executive director of the Wesley College Foundation which mobilizes resources for Wesley College in Tanzania.

Please excuse a few breaks in the video as the internet connection broke up some during the conversation which was done over zoom.

Summary of Scripture

Luke 4:14-21

- Jesus’ first recorded time speaking in the synagogue was in Luke 4. Jesus read from Isaiah 61:1-2 and then spoke the words that drew everyone’s attention, that these words had been fulfilled in the congregations presence that day.

- The words were Jesus' mission statement about himself. That he had come to...
 - Preach good news to the poor
 - Proclaim release to the prisoners
 - Proclaim healing for the blind
 - Proclaim the year of the Lord's favor or economic justice

Isaiah 61:1-4

- Isaiah 61:1-2 is what Jesus quoted in Luke 4, but this was part of a larger and longer portion of scripture. Isaiah is a prophetic book where we watch Israel walk through a cycle of walking away from God, God's judgement of Israel, and God's rescue of Israel.
- When originally written Isaiah 61 was a picture of God's rescue. The chapter starts by looking at the current reality of Israel having an abundance of blind, imprisoned, poor, depressed, and grieving people. Yet this picture is held up against what is possible with God, that he is sending someone to right this wrong and transform the poor into the blessed, the blind into the seeing, the captives into free people, and the grieving into the rejoicing.
- When Jesus reads this scripture in front of the synagogue and says that this vision has been fulfilled, we suddenly see that not only is Isaiah 61 a message to the Israel at the time of its writing, but is now a message to the whole world of what God is going to be doing through Christ. It becomes a message of eschatology, future fulfilment of the plan of God for this world. So we have to ask ourselves, if we are going to participate in the work of God how are we going to be part of bringing this vision to fruition? That is a question that Wesley College continues to ask itself to this day.

Dinna Sylvester's Story:

Rev. Wanyama mentions a former student, now graduate, during the lesson, Dinna Sylvester. Her story is here in its entirety for your reference.

Dinna grew up in Tarime, a small town in the northwest part of Tanzania. She is the oldest of three siblings. When she was 14 years old and in Form I of secondary school her father died. This remains one of Dinna's saddest memories because when her father died her mother also left, leaving her and her siblings to be raised by her uncles. The tradition in Tarime, among the Kuria Tribe, is that when a husband dies one of his brothers marries his widow.

This is how they ensure the families are taken care of, but it also means that the widow is passed onto to another husband to be a second or third wife without her consent. Dinna's mother, rather than be passed around the family, decided to leave. She has never returned.

Dinna and her siblings were split among family members, but with no one to advocate for them they did not have regular support for their education and even some of their basic needs. Dinna dropped out of school for a time and was only able to return after the government made secondary school free. When she did graduate it was with lower grades than she wanted, but she heard about Wesley College from a friend and decided to enroll. When she got to Wesley College she found a very different environment, parts of it were intimidating, like some of her instructors being from America. However, the longer she was there the more confident she became. On graduation day she was able to tell Rev. Wanyama that she could now look him in the face, something that was not possible when she first arrived at Wesley College because of the cultural tradition she had grown up with which said women did not look men in the eye.

Dinna, when she first came to Wesley College said her dream was to care for orphans and children in need. She is now working as a children's minister at her church, both fulfilling her calling as well as Wesley College's vision found in Isaiah 61. Dinna's confidence and joy has been restored and now she is working to restore hope and joy to others.

Questions:

Have you ever thought of Luke 4 as Jesus' mission statement or the church's mission statement?

How does this confirm or change your thoughts on what the church should be doing today?

Would you consider Wesley College's mission as part of the church's mission?

Does your church ministry have a story of transformation like Dinna's?