Can you just imagine being one of those people sitting in the temple that day Jesus came to preach?
The people of Nazareth had begun hearing about the rise of Jesus’ ministry.
He was beginning to get noticed.
Then they heard that Jesus was going to come back to his hometown and give a sermon.
I imagine he got to the temple, greeted his friends and family.
Then he took his place, unrolled the scroll with the Scripture appointed for the day, and read the words of the prophet Isaiah:
"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."

He closed the scroll, sat down, took a breath, and began his sermon with the words:
"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."
I imagine the people leaned in with interest, waiting to hear what he’d say next.
What could he mean, the Scripture had been fulfilled that day?
*He* fulfilled it?

Over time, some people have interpreted this moment of Scripture as summarizing Jesus’ mission statement.
It’s different then some mission statements we might give him, which prioritize his death as the primary reason for his earthly life.
But this one is much more focused on how Jesus saved people while he *lived*:
Bringing good news to the poor,
Releasing captives,
Giving sight to the blind,
Letting the oppressed go free,
And proclaiming God’s favor.

I mean, it sounds like a pretty fitting mission statement for Jesus to me.

Today’s a day in our church life where the question of mission statements feels especially applicable.
After church today, we’ll gather and talk about the past year of ministry at our Annual Meeting.
The meeting will feel somewhat more like a business meeting,
But underneath it all – behind the numbers and the stories and the plans,
Is the question of how we, as a church, lived into this mission of Jesus this past year.
Because, as followers of Christ, we’re called to, at least in part, live out this same mission statement.
So, in the all the comings and goings of St. Paul’s, we ask ourselves:
Have we brought good news and relief to the poor through our relationships in outreach?
Have we aided in the release of captives – wherever they are?
Have we taught Jesus’ mission through our formation?
And has our worship transformed us into followers of Christ?

Any of you who’ve ever been part of crafting a mission statement know that it’s a tricky thing.
The thing is, mission statements need to be equal parts attainable and aspirational.
Because otherwise, they’d just be too overwhelming and, in the end, discouraging.

If I’m honest, I feel a bit overwhelmed by the idea of this selection of Scripture being our mission statement.
All together, it sounds like a lot to bring good news to the poor, to release captives, give sight to the blind, and offer relief to the oppressed.

It’s overwhelming on an individual level – how could I ever hope to do this,
but also on a church-wide level – how could we ever do this?

If we read a little farther than the verses appointed for today in the Gospel of Luke,
We’d realize that, in part, these words got Jesus run out of his own hometown,
And pushed to the edge of a cliff – literally (Luke 4:29).
I mean, not to mention that only a few years later this kind of mission statement actually got Jesus killed.
So that doesn’t help in our experience of being overwhelmed.

As we start to get overwhelmed with the enormity of the task at hand,
We begin to feel a creeping sense of dread that perhaps we’re all doomed to failure in this particularly challenging mission of following Christ.
But, as is typical, Scripture has an answer for us…
One of our other assigned texts for today is the deeply familiar metaphor of the body of Christ from 1 Corinthians.
The Apostle Paul – our Church’s namesake – wrote:
“For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free.”

We are one body, each different members:
    Some, the feet.
    Some, the hands.
    Some, the heart.

The truly amazing thing about this metaphor, both when Paul first penned it, and even still today, is how radically equalizing it is.
No part of the body is better than another.
This concept of embodied institutions and groups was common in Paul’s time,
But it was always interpreted in a top-down way.
The head was the absolute most important – most essential.
Paul changed this, and said:
“God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member,
that there may be no dissension within the body,
but the members may have the same care for one another.
If one member suffers, all suffer together with it;
if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”

No competition.
No hierarchy.
All parts of the body, working together, to live.

Now we, gathered here on this winter morning/my friends, “are the body of Christ,
And individually members of it.”
And within this body, God has appointed us different gifts.

As I re-read this familiar and extraordinary metaphor of the body,
I began to find hope and a sense of calm taking over.

That mission statement of Christ – of freed captives, and sight, and relief – is **not our task alone to achieve.**
It never was.
Because we are members individually of the Body of Christ that has been growing and changing
and aging and evolving for thousands of years.

As we sit down as a church body to reflect on our mission,
We know that each of us brings different gifts.
Some of us bring the gift of discernment: Asking the hard questions to keep us pointed towards the truth.
Some, the gift of presence: Showing up week after week with relentless faithfulness.
Some, whether very young or very old, bring the gift of wisdom.
Some of us bring the gift of leadership, mobilizing us into action for Christ’s kingdom.
And some of us bring the gift of hope, believing that missions that feel so unachievable can really, one day, with God’s help, be accomplished.

Each and every one of us brings a unique gift to this work of building God’s kingdom.
Each and every one of us is an irreplaceable part of the body of Christ, that belongs here completely.

May the words of our patron saint Paul find new life and renewal among us today.
May we live as the Body of Christ,
Seeing each other as indispensable members of the same body,
Drinking from the same cup,
Dreaming of the same goal,
And living together to live out mission of Christ:
To bring good news to the rich and the poor,
To set each other free from all that binds us,
To help those see what they never thought they’d see again,
And to bring relief to the oppressed. Amen.