**January 2017**

**We Are Called to Speak to Issues of Eternity**

**UM is the Vehicle Devotional**

As we start a New Year together in community as American Baptists, it is a good time to turn to Luke 4: 16-21. These verses are the thesis statement of Jesus’ ministry. By reading Isaiah’s words aloud in the temple, Christ was claiming both the honor and the responsibility of doing God’s work here on Earth.

*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 let the oppressed, go free,*

*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.”*

We know what happened next. Jesus went forth sharing the good news. He gathered first his disciples and then followers and inspired them to do the same. While speaking to issues of eternity, Jesus demonstrated that we are not to care about people only when they die: we must actively show our love for one another right now, in the present moment, while people are alive and their situations can be improved.

Among God’s many gifts is the strength given to us as individuals, so that we can each go forth and do what we can. We have also been given the gift of Jesus’ example: He built and worked with a strong community that together fed the hungry, healed the sick, cared for the poor and stood for the oppressed.

Let us pray that we as American Baptists continue to strengthen and build the relationships we have with each other and with those outside the walls of the church. We give thanks for the tools already in place to do this work, including United Mission, and ask for continued guidance to use the gifts we’ve been granted to the very best of our ability.

In Jesus’ name – Amen.