

Doubtless

3afterEpiphany

Pastor Josh Frazee

Luke 4:16-30

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the Apology, or explanation, of the Augsburg Confession, it is made quite clear that “there needs to be a teaching in the church from which the faithful may receive the certain hope of salvation. For the opponents give bad advice when they command people to doubt whether or not they have obtained the forgiveness of sins (BoC, pp.139-140).” The purpose of the Gospel is that you would be made doubtless that you have eternal life. As John wrote at the end of his Gospel: “these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have eternal life in his name.”

Seems simple, right? It is. Yet in order for the Gospel to be truly appreciated, the Law must be preached in its fullness. As first president of the LCMS C.F.W. Walther put in his sixth thesis regarding Law and Gospel: “The Law makes no one godly. Rather, when the Law begins to take effect, the person begins to fume and rage against God. He hates the preacher who has shouted the Law into his heart, feeling that he cannot slip off its coils. When this happens, you sometimes hear people say: ‘I will never go to that church again. Why, that preacher strikes terror into my soul. I prefer to attend the services of Rev. So-and-so. He makes you feel good. When you listen to him, you realize what a good person you really are.’ Alas! Down in hell these same people will want to take revenge on the preacher when they see how that false prophet got them thrown into the pit (Law and Gospel: Readers’ Edition, pp.91-92).”

In our text this morning from Luke, we hear Jesus, God manifested among us, preach from His own Word from Isaiah. Let’s explore how He Himself used Law and Gospel as He preached.

Verse 1

“(Jesus) came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. (He proceeded to read the text) And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’”

What a proclamation of Gospel! “‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” How do we receive faith? By hearing the Word. And there, right among them, was the fulfillment of the Gospel, Jesus, God in human flesh, who had come to set His people free. Today. That day, and today both, God’s Word was and is fulfilled in the hearing of His Word.

And all there were happy to hear His Words. But at the same time, they couldn’t help but ask, “‘Is this not Joseph’s son?’” Well, the short answer is no, Jesus was not Joseph’s son. That aside; the people were having trouble focusing on the Word rather than how cute it was that this young man who had grown up as little boy in their own neighborhood was there preaching for them.

You, dear friends in Christ, are receiving the Gospel here and now today as well. In your hearing the Scripture is being fulfilled for you. It is in the hearing of the Word, both the Law and the Gospel, that you receive Jesus. God still manifests Himself among us as we hear His Word and receive His gifts.

Verse 2

“And he said to them, ‘Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, “Physician, heal yourself.” What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’ And he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them were cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.’ When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.”

Jesus continues to preach to them and their thoughts concerning Him changed abruptly. No longer was He this cute little boy grown into a man—now He was challenging them that those awful Gentiles could receive salvation! How terrible!

Was this not the response Walther asserted would happen when the Law was preached? That the congregation would become so irate? Perhaps even fume so much that they would want to throw the pastor out and kill him? And for doing what? For doing the very thing he had been called by God to do.

Walther wrote his Law and Gospel well over a hundred years ago; but how much does what he wrote remind you of what is going on today? Does no one ever say today “‘I will never go to that church again. Why, that preacher strikes terror into my soul. I prefer to attend the services of Rev. So-and-so. He makes you feel good. When you listen to him, you realize what a good person you really are’”?

So why do pastors continue to preach the Law? Because there would be no need for a Savior if we were really good people. But we are not good people. You are sinners, just as I am a sinner. You deserve to go to hell for all those qualities you think are so good about yourself. Does hearing that make you want to never come to this church again? Does it make you fume against me?

It not only happens to sinner pastors; it happened to Jesus when He preached there in His hometown. Just look at the next verses.

Verse 3

“And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.”

Jesus left Nazareth ending on Law, yet having delivered the Gospel at the beginning. But more Gospel would be coming. Jesus would go to the cross to pay for the sins of all of humanity, including those of the people of His hometown who just tried to kill Him. He would also pay for the sins of all the Jews who weren't there, for the sins of those quote-unquote “awful” Gentiles, and for the sins of everyone else of all time, including your pastor and including you.

Jesus had told the people of Nazareth that it was “doubtless” that they would tell Him to “heal himself”—and they did, when He was on the cross. They “scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself.’” And just as truly, Jesus died on the cross to pay for all sins, as He has said in His Word, so that it may be just as doubtless that every sin has been paid for and forgiven. Walther preached on delivering Law in its fullness, but also the Gospel. Our Confessions make it clear that the Gospel should be taught fully and purely. And Jesus Himself made it so by coming to earth and manifesting Himself as God in human flesh and dying for the sins of the world. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

