

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church  
Shobonier, Illinois  
Epiphany 3C  
January 23, 2022  
Luke 4:16-30

As the Sermon Turns

[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. 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 proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 20 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. 21 And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Cities and towns often have signs recognizing a local hero, a hometown boy (or girl) who made good. People are proud when someone from their town accomplishes something good and brings at least a small measure of glory to the town.

Yet, when Jesus returned home to Nazareth, there were no signs to welcome Him home. Still, He, the Son of the living God, went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was His custom. So note that if Jesus observed the custom of going to church where the Word of God was read and proclaimed, how could we dare not go to church where the Word of God is read and proclaimed, and, even more, Jesus is present to give us His Body and Blood?

Evidently, He had been asked to read the scriptures that day and expound them. What He read was a clearly messianic passage from Isaiah chapter 61:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

What a marvelous text this is! It overflows with gracious promises concerning the Anointed One, the promised Messiah, the coming Christ, the Deliverer and Redeemer of Israel.

Having read those wonderful words, Jesus rolled up the scroll, returned it to the attendant, and sat down, assuming the posture of the teacher. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him, intently watching Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." These words of Jesus are stunning - gracious and wonderful to be sure

- but astounding to those who have heard the Word. He was claiming to be the Messiah they had been waiting for.

Indeed, the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him. At His Baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove. Jesus had thus been "anointed to preach good news to the poor." He had come to proclaim forgiveness of sins. That's the best news of all! And with that forgiveness comes freedom from bondage to sin, death, and the devil. That forgiveness brings sight to those living in the darkness of sin and the shadow of death. The message of God's love in Christ releases those burdened with sin and guilt.

But rather than believe "the gracious words that came from his lips," the people were shocked and skeptical. They were full of suspicion, disbelief, and hostility. This sermon bothered them. After all, wasn't this Joseph's son? They had seen Jesus grow up. They thought they knew Him. And now He claims to be the Messiah? That's outrageous!

But when Jesus pointed out that no prophet is acceptable in his hometown, that started to fuel the opposition. And when He cited the examples of Elijah providing for the widow of Zarephath during a famine, and Elisha healing Naaman the Syrian of his leprosy, that did it. God showed mercy to Gentiles and not to the many Israelites who also suffered. And those hearing Jesus would not bear hearing any more. They would not endure hearing that God's grace and mercy would extend to the Gentiles. They did not want that kind of Messiah.

But their refusal to accept Jesus' message was a crass and open refusal to believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and that His message is true. Jesus had meddled in their lives because His word touched the sensitive nerves of stubbornness and pride. And He does the same to us. He exposes us for what we are. He reveals the brokenness that rebellion against the Father's will always brings. He puts the finger on our skepticism and tells it the way it is. There is no backing away from the truth or the tragedy of the situation in the synagogue at Nazareth; Jesus perceived the thoughts of their hearts for what they were. And He said, "I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his hometown."

But the folks in the synagogue would not hear any more from this Jesus. They were furious and "got up, drove [Jesus] out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff." They had rejected Jesus, but Jesus had not rejected them. Jesus didn't shake the dust off His feet.

Rather, He accomplished His mission, and He did it by allowing Himself to be placed into the hands of sinful, violent people. This happened not in Nazareth, for this was not His time, but in Jerusalem in the fullness of God's time and plan. He entered Jerusalem in glory. Then He was led out of the city to be hung on a cross. And by His death and resurrection He "proclaims the year of our Lord's favor."

Christ has accomplished His saving mission in us when we know Him and believe on Him as our Lord, our Savior. This is why He must confront our sins and skepticism. This is why He must

overturn our timetables and our priorities and our plans. It is because His mission is a mission of love, that His love must first confront, overturn, and crucify the sins that stand in His way. By His death on the cross, He has crucified our sins.

Sometimes, our response to Jesus may be like that of the folks in Nazareth that day, especially when His word confronts us where we would rather not have Him "intrude." "Who do you think you are?" asks the world of the Christian when we speak of sin. "Who do you think you are?" is the perfectly predictable question spoken when sexual immorality is exposed and confronted, when a marriage partner is destroying the relationship by selfish behavior and is told so, when a lifestyle is not Christian and we say so to a straying or falling brother or sister in Christ. "Who do you think you are?" is a question we mumble under our breath when the Word of God spoken by the pastor or by a concerned lay person is directed at us. "Who are they to question my stewardship of treasure? That's my business, not theirs." "Who is he to question my slipping church attendance?" "Who are they to suggest that I might need Bible Study?" "Who is he to criticize my language?" "Who do they think they are?" What we don't say, but what we are saying inwardly where no one else can hear, is: "Who does God think He is? It's none of His business."

And as the people of Nazareth showed their rejection of Jesus and His Word by trying to throw Him off a cliff, so people today show their rejection of Jesus and His Word by trying to harm the pastors He sends to them. After all, those faithful pastors who continue to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to those captive in sin and oppressed by death and the devil, those who are blind to the things of God, are simply continuing Christ's work among us.

But to carelessly or skeptically dismiss Jesus Christ as a mere man or to push aside the Gospel is to say "no" to God and "no" to the truth about the forgiveness of your sins and "no" to life in the Spirit. To refuse to acknowledge your sins, or to refuse to forgive those who sin against you, to hold a grudge, is to refuse the forgiveness offered by God in Christ. Indeed, we need to be confronted by God's Law to make us ready for the Gospel.

That's why Jesus continues His saving work among us through His pastors He gives to His Church. The pastor is called to preach the Good News to the poor by telling them of this Gospel of God - called to proclaim release to the captives by absolving the penitent of their sins - called to give sight to the blind by showing them Christ crucified for the sins of the world - called to set at liberty those who are oppressed by taking them to the cross and the empty Easter tomb - and called to read the Word to the people of God.

What Word? Well, today, on this day, it is this Word of God ...

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,  
Because He has anointed Me to preach Good News to the poor.  
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."

God grant that we joyfully hear that word as the Good News that it is to the glory of His holy name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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