

Luke 4:16-30
"Fulfilled in Your Hearing"
Third Sunday after the Epiphany (C)

January 23, 2022
First Ev. Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

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

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

Imagine the son of the congregation coming home. Imagine how delighted everyone would be when the seminary graduate returns to his home congregation. Many in the congregation would recall this adult man as a child sitting with his parents in the pew, attending Sunday School and Youth Group.

As he enters the church building, he would be greeted with smiles, handshakes, and conversation: "How was seminary?" "What did you learn?"

This is likely how it would have been when Jesus returned to Nazareth – except He didn't return from seminary, since He is God in human flesh. But He would have been greeted with smiles, pleasant conversation, and instead of handshakes, he would have been kissed on the cheek. You see, this was a great day for the synagogue in Nazareth, since their son of the congregation has returned to the place where he had been brought up.

And as it is custom for a seminarian or recent seminary graduate, a rabbi would also be invited to preach at his home congregation. And as the son of the congregation would preach, everyone in the pews would look in amazement at the man they once knew as a child. But for Jesus, He was returning to Nazareth as a renown rabbi, especially for His miracles, as His name had spread throughout Galilee and beyond. He – *who left Nazareth as a man who did not appear out of the ordinary* – returns as a recognized rabbi of divine truth.

Today on this Third Sunday after the Epiphany, Jesus returns to where He spent every Sabbath of His childhood and youth.

[That Day in Nazareth]

Now, it is certainly Jesus' custom to go to a synagogue every Sabbath. He would maintain this custom throughout His life and travels. On this particular Sabbath, Jesus likely attends with family, friends, and neighbors to worship in His hometown synagogue.

Notice that Jesus does not seek to worship God in His own way, choosing to be somewhere else, but as God desires – in God's house and on the Sabbath day. We might imagine that, *being the Son of God*, Jesus would not benefit from attending such a worship service. Yet, this is precisely what He does! He sees hearing His Word as precious!

During the service, Scripture is read and expounded by the leader of the synagogue or by a guest. On this day, Jesus is invited to read the appointed lectionary text and to address the congregation with words of instruction and admonition to them.

Now, we do not know if Jesus was asked in advance to do the reading. In fact, it was not necessary. A synagogue custom was to allow any visiting rabbi that honor.

So, on this particular Sabbath day, Jesus stood up to read. As He came forward, the attendant, known as a chazzan, gave Jesus the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah, likely because this is where the reading from the previous Sabbath left off.

Jesus then unrolled the scroll and scanned it to find where He would begin reading and spoke:

***“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”*** (Luke 4:18-19 from Isaiah 61:1-2a).

He then rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the chazzan and sat down. It may seem odd that Jesus would sit down, but this was the custom then as the rabbi would sit down to address the people.

Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on Him. Everyone was thinking, “What is our son of the congregation going to say?” They were all waiting in expectation.

Then Jesus began His sermon saying, ***“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”*** (Luke 4:21). Jesus certainly said more, but this was the bombshell of His sermon. This was the vocal pipe bomb they heard. These are the words that caught everyone’s attention. These are the words that remained in everyone’s mind: ***“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”***

What does this mean? What is Jesus saying? What exactly was fulfilled in their hearing?

Jesus came this particular day in order to read Isaiah 61 and to declare that the messianic era of salvation has now begun in Him. By Him reading Isaiah 61, He is revealing who He truly is and what He is all about.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed me” (Luke 4:18). Does this sound familiar? Here, Jesus is referring to His Baptism by John in the Jordan River. With these words, Jesus fulfills how He has been publicly appointed as the Christ, the Messiah of the world, as the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove and how God the Father spoke from Heaven saying, ***“You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased”*** (Luke 4:22a-b).

But wait, there’s more! Jesus continues from Isaiah 61 saying the Trinitarian plan of salvation is ***“to proclaim good news to the poor”*** (Luke 3:22c). The plan of salvation is to preach. You see, preaching is the most important thing Jesus does. Everything else Jesus does comes as a result of His preaching.

Jesus continues, ***“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”*** (Luke 4:18d-19). Here, Jesus says He was sent as God the Father’s first Apostle. As God the Father’s Apostle, He has come to release the captives. This means He has come to bring liberation from the bondage of sin, sickness, and Satan. At times, this liberation would involve physical healing, exorcism, and rebuking of destructive forces of nature. But ultimately, Jesus has come to forgive sins.

Here, Jesus is announcing that through Isaiah’s text that the Messiah is now present to complete the prophetic pattern of preaching and miracle working.

To all of this, Jesus says: ***“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”*** (Luke 4:21).

With this in their mind, the congregation looks intently at Jesus. At first, this is neither positive nor negative. They just “wonder” and “marvel” at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth. Maybe for a few seconds, the crowd saw Jesus as just an adult man, whom they never met. Then there is a surprised confusion. They came to the realization that they knew Jesus. They remembered Jesus as a boy. Many in the crowd began saying, ***“Is not this Joseph’s son?”*** (Luke 4:22)

Jesus, then knowing what was on everyone’s mind, then began speaking: ***“Doubtless you will quote Me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well”*** (Luke 4:23).

You see, Jesus’ fame had spread. He knew that this congregation would demand the types of miracles He had done in Capernaum. He knew they wanted Him to prove Himself as a miracle worker. But He did not come this day to ultimately do that, He came this day to do His most important task, which is preaching.

But they didn’t want to hear His preaching! They wanted to see miracles! They wanted to see with their very eyes of what had been reported of Jesus ***“through all the surrounding country”*** (Luke 4:14).

Jesus, who came to preach of who He is and what He is about, then says, ***“Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in His hometown”*** (Luke 4:24). He then continues speaking of how Elijah and Elisha were also rejected for preaching God’s truth to the people of Israel. So, God sent them to Gentiles, like the widow of Zarephath and to the leper Naaman.

Even nearly 2,000 years later, people still despise preaching and His Word. Each Sunday many people do not want to be invited by God to rest and reflect on His Word and receive His forgiveness through His Means of Grace in order to strengthen their faith in Him.

At the same time, many come and do not like what was preached, because it does not scratch their *“itching ears”* (2 Timothy 4:3). Instead of hearing about God’s Law and how they have sinned against God and their neighbor through their thoughts, words, and actions, many would rather hear and be affirmed on how good they are. They don’t want God’s forgiveness. They only want to be affirmed that they are a good person without hearing anything about Jesus.

Today, pastors are to be faithful to God and His Word by preaching, teaching, and giving the Sacrament. In doing so, sometimes pastors in order to be faithful to Christ will suffer when preaching the truth.

Back nearly 2,000 years ago, after Jesus preached that He is the Promised One who has come to liberate the people from demons, sickness, sin, and death through Him forgiving sins – *and that He has come as the Messiah to the Gentiles too* – all in the synagogue were filled with wrath! The mood changed. Instead of seeing Jesus as the son of the congregation, they are extremely offended. “How can Joseph’s son claim to be the Messiah?” “This imposter came from down the street, not from heaven!” “How dare He claim to be God!” “Only God can forgive sins!” “We are God’s chosen people, not the Gentiles!”

What they fail to consider is that Jesus is – in fact – the very Son of God. He is the fulfillment of God’s promises, just as He said. This will be the same conclusion that Caiaphas and the other Jewish leaders will use to justify Jesus’ crucifixion. It’s just too much to believe that this ordinary hometown Jewish Man is the very Son of God.

These people asked for a miracle. They demanded a miracle! Filled with wrath, they rose up and drove Jesus out of Nazareth and brought Him to the brow of the hill, so they could throw him down the cliff in order to kill Him.

Steeped in their sin, only violence was their response to the truth Jesus has preached to them. *“But passing through their midst, He went away”* (Luke 4:30). There is the miracle! Jesus eludes the crowd and they don’t fulfill the evil in their hearts.

But others will accomplish it, but only at the time appointed by God. The Jewish leaders will eventually crucify Jesus despite their own custom of providing liberty to a captive at Passover. A captive will go free, but Jesus goes to the executioner.

“They all cried out together, ‘Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas – a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. ... They kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify Him!” (Luke 23:18-19, 21).

In the end, evil will fail to triumph over Him. Jesus will triumph over evil when He is raised from the dead!

[Today]

On that day in Nazareth, Jesus came to announce to His home congregation that He is the Messiah – *the Christ* – who has been sent to Teach and be the Miracle Worker. As He stood reading God’s Word, He is the One who inspired Isaiah to write those very words. He is the Word made flesh reading His very own Word!

What happened in Nazareth that day is still happening now! Jesus came to teach and to be a miracle worker! Today! Right now! This has been brought to your fulfillment to your ears that Jesus is the Messiah through His Word! The people then asked for a miracle. Here, we witness miracles with Baptisms, with God’s absolution, and in turning mere bread and wine into Christ’s very Body and Blood as those who commune see, touch, and taste the forgiveness Christ won for you on the cross!

Today, in this place, Jesus proclaims good news to all who are poor in spirit. Here, ***“the Spirit of the Lord”*** is upon us, to release us from the oppression of our sin and guilt. Here, Jesus offers ***“recovering of sight”*** for spiritual blindness, so all might see Him clearly as their Savior, whose forgiveness sets them free from fear and death. You see, today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing! Amen!

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep you hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠