

**Luke 4:16-30**

Epiphany 3C + January 27, 2019  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho  
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Fulfilled in Your Hearing

The Word of the Lord from Luke 4:20-21: "And [Jesus] 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.'" This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Last week, we had Jesus' first miracle in the Gospel of John; and today, we have His first sermon in the Gospel of Luke. It takes place back in Nazareth, His hometown; and as is His custom, He goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath. It is given to Him to read the Scripture that day, and so He unrolls the scroll to Isaiah, and reads:

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 (Is. 61:1-2).

Then it's time for Him to preach, and all ears tune in for what He's about to say. But before we hear Him, keep this in mind: for centuries, men have gone to the synagogue. For centuries, they've read from the Old Testament; and for centuries, they have spoken with hope – but not with authority. In other words, a rabbi might read that same portion of Isaiah and then say, "Someday, when the Messiah comes, the Spirit of the Lord will be upon Him and He will do these many wonderful things. Someday this will be fulfilled. Someday."

You can see then why Jesus' first words create a stir: He reads this prophecy that is so clearly about the Messiah, and then He says to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Not "someday," but "today." Not "this Scripture has been fulfilled somewhere," but "this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Straightaway, Jesus says to the people of His hometown, "You've been waiting for the Christ, and here I am."

It's hard to argue, is it not? The prophecy begins, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me," and you just heard that happen in Luke 3: when Jesus was baptized, the Father declared His pleasure in His beloved Son as the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. That anointing has visibly, publicly set Jesus apart as the fulfillment of Isaiah 61, and so what does He come to do?

He comes to proclaim good news to the poor. He demonstrates this in a literal sense by providing food for the hungry, by healing beggars and the like. But that's small potatoes: poverty, hunger and general lack of necessities are all wrought by the curse of sin. However, Jesus has not come merely to put a chicken in every pot: He has come to destroy the cause of *all* scarcity and hardship. His ongoing ministry to the poor demonstrates that they also have God's love and favor, that His salvation is for them – not just the rich and famous.

But know this: if the cause of hardship is the curse of sin, then everyone is poor because they suffer a poverty of righteousness. When Jesus proclaims good news to the poor, the good news is the gospel, and "the poor" means all of humanity, for all are sinners.

The Messiah comes to proclaim liberty to the captives. "Captivity" is a poignant term in the history of the Jews. They were captives in Egypt for 400 years, and the Lord remembered them. They

were more recently captives in Babylon with Jerusalem reduced to rubble, and the Lord remembered them. By the end of the Bible, both Egypt and Babylon are types for captivity to sin, death and devil. In our text, plenty of Jesus' hearers are hoping that the Messiah will come and free them from their current "captivity" to the Roman Empire, but that's small potatoes again. Christ is about the kingdom of heaven, not political empires. Even while Jesus is in Nazareth, John the Baptist is in captivity under Herod, and he will die in prison; yet in Christ, John is already more liberated than Herod ever will be. Likewise, Jesus has not come to free Jerusalem from the tyranny of Rome with its widespread peace, sensible code of law, really nice roads, safe travel and aqueducts. He has come to free people from sin and death and hell.

The Messiah comes to proclaim the recovering of sight to the blind. I love that one, because embedded in Isaiah's prophecy is the stunning truth that the Messiah will heal by proclaiming, by speaking blindness away. Jesus heals the blind on several occasions throughout His ministry; and in doing so, He proves that He has power over the curse of sin upon the body. That's remarkable, and He even demonstrates that He can raise the dead. But there is more than one kind of blindness: there is a blindness of unbelief, and so – for instance – Jesus will admonish the scribes and Pharisees as blind guides, even as He blesses those who have eyes that see and believe. Even healing physical blindness is comparatively small potatoes in the big picture: Jesus has come to remove the blindness of sin so that people might believe in Him; and believing in Him, might have eternal life.

The Messiah comes to set at liberty those who are oppressed. This isn't the same as the captives: a better translation is that He has come to "send the broken ones into remission." Whatever is broken, Jesus unbreaks. Whatever does the breaking is conquered. Leprosy? Gone. Demons? Sent fleeing away. Guilt and shame? Goodbye. Paralysis? Hemorrhaging? Fever? Death? Nothing is a match for the Messiah.

Finally, the Messiah comes to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. In the Old Testament, this was called the Year of Jubilee; and in Old Testament Israel, the Lord declared that every fiftieth year, debts were to be forgiven, land returned and slaves set free. It was a year of forgiveness, of pardon and redemption. It was a big deal, especially if you'd had to sell the family homestead – or yourself into slavery – in order to pay off debt; but it was only a type of the bigger deal to come: for when the Messiah came, He would set free those who were captive to sin. He would open the gates so that God's people might enter the Promised Land of heaven. He would forgive their debt incurred by their sin.

You know how He does it. He assumes their debt. He pays for it on the cross. He defeats sin by bearing it. He defeats death by dying.

One last thing about that prophecy from Isaiah. Look at the verbs to describe the Messiah's work: "proclaim," "proclaim," "proclaim" and "set at liberty." If the Messiah does these things by proclaiming, then He's doing it by speaking. And as we mentioned above, the verb for "set at liberty" is actually, "send;" and the word carries the freight of *sending by speaking*, as when Jesus sent out the apostles. In other words, according to Isaiah the Messiah does His work by speaking His Word.

Thus far Isaiah. That's what the Messiah comes to do, with the Spirit of the Lord upon Him.

And there, in Nazareth, Jesus says, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

In little old podunk Nazareth, the Messiah stands and declares that He has come.

That turns out to be a problem. On the bright side, they marvel and speak gracious words: and if ever there's a time for a town to hold a "local boy makes good" parade, this is it. They go in a darker direction, though: "Is not this Joseph's son?" Isn't this the local carpenter's kid – and can the local

carpenter's kid be *the Christ*? They've heard the rumors: they've heard that He's worked miracles in Capernaum, but He hasn't worked any in Nazareth.

All they've gotten from Jesus so far is Jesus speaking; which, is exactly how Isaiah foretold the Messiah would operate. For them, though, the Word that Jesus speaks is not enough. Thus, as Jesus points out, they embrace the proverb, "Physician, heal yourself:" in other words, talk is cheap. Prove it with some wonders.

This is a poignant moment: Jesus returns to His hometown, and they do not receive Him. He speaks His powerful, life-giving Word, and their response is, "Nah." Nazareth is full of poor, blind captives. In answer, Jesus speaks to them of Elijah and Elisha, of the widow at Zarephath and Naaman, and His teaching here is bigger news than you might think. In both cases, Elijah and Elisha were godly prophets rejected by God's people, just as Jesus is being rejected at Nazareth; yet both the widow and Naaman were Gentiles who believed and received God's gifts. Jesus thus makes three big points: one is that He is the Messiah, whether they receive Him or not. Another is that only one widow and one leper were helped at that time; so just because Capernaum has gotten some miracles, it doesn't mean that Nazareth does too. After all, they have what they need: the Christ and His Word. The third point – and this is huge – is that He has also come to save the Gentiles.

This text is just a tiny instance of how the story unfolds, yes? Fast forward to Calvary, where the scribes and the Pharisees are shouting the same thing as "Physician, heal yourself!", but with the words, "Let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him" (Matt. 27:42). And as His own reject Him, it's the Roman – the *Gentile* – centurion who says, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk. 15:39) And how does the Church unfold in Acts? The apostles go to the synagogues; and when they are rejected, they preach to the Gentiles, for Jesus is the Savior for all who believe.

Jesus is the Savior for all who believe! What an announcement! What an epiphany! What joy! But because His fellow Nazarenes have not received Him, they do not receive His words, either. Their solution? Oh, they have a parade: they drive Him out of town to throw Him off a cliff. It's here, at the end of the day, that the hometown gets a sign of His power: He walks right through the murderous mob, and no one can lay a finger on Him. His hour has not yet come: when it does, there will be another parade where He carries His cross out of Jerusalem to die on a hill outside.

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The Messiah still proclaims good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, restoration to the broken and the year of the Lord's favor.

He proclaims this to you because He has shed His blood to redeem you. He has made you His own in your baptism, and so it is entirely appropriate to say of you that the Spirit of the Lord is upon you – not to be the Redeemer, but to be among the redeemed.

Jesus has proclaimed good news – *the Good News* – to you, the poor. By His holy Gospel, He has given you His grace, His righteousness and a place in the kingdom of heaven. For your sake, He became poor by assuming the poverty of your sin and dying for it, so that you might be rich with His gifts of salvation.

Jesus has proclaimed His Word to free you from captivity. Even though sin harasses you daily, it's not your master anymore. Even though death still beckons from your grave, it cannot hold onto you. Even though the devil blusters that he's got you trapped in guilt and shame, Christ has carried your sin, guilt and shame to the cross, and He's died your death to conquer it for you. These enemies will howl and try to make you miserable, but remember: for Jesus' sake, they don't own you anymore.

Jesus has proclaimed His Word to recover your sight for you. Once you were blind in sin, and there was no way you could look to Him and say, "Jesus has died for me, and I am forgiven." But now you can, because by His Word He has spoken faith into you. Now you can see.

Brokenness? You are still broken and more breakable, because you're still in a broken creation. But Jesus has spoken to send you into eternal remission. He has borne your infirmities to the cross; and even if your afflictions are lifelong in this world, they have an expiration date. In Christ, you do not.

Jesus proclaims the year of the Lord's favor to you. Before God, your debts are forgiven. Your slavery is no more. You are free. Jesus is your year of Jubilee, and so your Jubilee does not end.

There could be no better news. There could be no greater gift. All yours, free, because Christ has paid the price with His own blood.

What is left to say? How 'bout this: beware, lest you try to throw Him over a cliff.

Here's the thing with sinful flesh: you're constantly tempted to be bothered more by your daily stresses and afflictions than by the threat of sin and hell. You're more bothered by little prisons, small-potatoes captivities and minor fractures than you are by the thought of eternal death. That sounds ridiculous, but here's how it goes. Everyone is given crosses and burdens in this life: you will always be afflicted in this sinful world. Affliction afflicts – it isn't pleasant, and you will want to get out from under it. Sometimes, the Lord delivers quickly, sometimes not so quickly, and sometimes He allows the trial to remain for life. As a Christian, you know from His Word that He uses suffering to strengthen your faith, because He uses it to expose idols that can't save and to teach you to trust solely in Him. You also know that He works all things for your good.

But you will always be tempted to believe that the Lord is unjust when He permits suffering, even though your sin deserves far worse than that the Lord has already died to deliver you from. You'll be tempted to believe that He's unfaithful to His Word, even though His Word clearly says that there will be trials as you walk in the steps of the suffering Savior. You'll be tempted to believe He is unfaithful to you. Envy of those delivered will seek to destroy your patience and faith. If you fail to repent of such sinful thoughts, you'll want to go it alone. You'll want to throw Jesus over the cliff. But it is not He who hits rock bottom.

To use the same examples of Jesus, a believing leper would not say, "It's not fair that Naaman got healed!", but "I see in that healing a demonstration that I will be healed on the Last Day!" A believing widow wouldn't say, "How come the widow at Zarephath gets all of God's love?", but "God's little demonstration of love for that mother and child reminds me that He hasn't forgotten any of His people, myself included." A believer in Nazareth in Luke 4 wouldn't say, "Jesus isn't fair because He's healed so many in Capernaum," but "By those miracles there, I am assured that the Messiah has come, and He will miraculously raise me from the dead."

Is that easy to say? No. It's impossible apart from faith – the faith worked in you by the Spirit of the Lord who has been poured out upon you. That's why you repent of your sins, including your sins of envy, impatience and resentment when trial comes along; and you cling to the promise that God's grace is sufficient for you, that His power is made perfect in weakness, and that He will deliver you.

He will: He has given up His Son to the cross to make it so, so do not be dismayed. The Lord Jesus Christ proclaims to you abundance, liberation, faith, restoration from all that is broken and the resurrection to eternal life on the Last Day; and He does so with this Good News, these joyous words: "I forgive you all of your sins."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen