

Third Sunday after Epiphany – January 27, 2013
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 4:14-21 (NIV 84)

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15) He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. 16) He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. 17) The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18) "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19) to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 20) Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, 21) and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Dear Friends in Christ:

It's hard to believe but 10 years ago we lived in a world without Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter, the I-Phone, Hybrid Cars, Kindles and I-Pads. We live in a changing world. We're used to new things. Things come and things go. Things that seem new and innovative today will become old and outdated tomorrow.

Here are some new things that have come and gone in my life time: The first cassette player was made in 1963. It's not quite obsolete but it's headed that way. When's the last time you bought a cassette tape? Floppy discs – that were really big and well, floppy, arrived in the 70's and have been all but replaced by CD's and USB Drives.

It really doesn't matter if we are 10 years old or 50 years old – we all live in a changing world. If the world has changed so much in just 10 years well it would seem that there's no way we could have anything in common with the world at Jesus' time – over 2000 years ago. That's what we might think but interesting enough and thankfully enough some things will never change. And so we could also make a long list of things that are the same today as they were at the time of Christ. As we consider our text for today we can note some of those similarities.

In our text for today, Jesus stood up and read from the long scroll which contained the inspired writings of Isaiah the prophet. We don't have a video recording of that event but if we close our eyes we can imagine the scene in our minds. We might envision the people wearing the long flowing robes. We might picture the big scroll and Jesus sitting down cross legged on the floor to instruct the people. We can even add an audio supplement to that scene as we imagine Jesus saying: Today the words of the prophet are coming true as you listen to me. And in our minds we can scan the crowd and see the reaction on their faces as they look intently toward Jesus. We can even imagine some of their thoughts as we recall that this was the place where Jesus grew up as a child. These people had seen Jesus leave as a man who didn't appear out of the ordinary but now he was one who was well known for his miracles and his teaching. How exciting it must have been to have heard Jesus read: **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19) to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."** How exciting to have been there when he said to them: **Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.** I say to you today, my friends:

Theme: Today this Scripture is Fulfilled in Your Hearing.

1. Today Christ still comes to you
2. Today the good news is proclaimed to you
3. Today God's favor is declared to you

Today This Scripture is Fulfilled in Your Hearing. Through his grace and by his word Christ comes to you.

Our text tells us that Jesus **16) ... went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. 17) The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.**

Jesus was attending the worship service in Nazareth at the synagogue which was the center of worship where the Jews would gather each week to worship their God, to be refreshed with his Word. This was the place where the children would come to learn the Word of God, where they would learn the 10 commandments and the history of God's people as well as the promises of the Messiah or Savior. Today we have gathered in the Lord's name in his house of worship. This, too, is a place where we come to worship our God, to hear his comforting words. We bring our children to this place so they can learn more about what God has done for them. Just as the synagogue was a place to grow in the grace and knowledge of God so we have dedicated this building as place where we can come to worship our God and hear his word – a place where we can grow in our faith as we are nurtured by God's inspired Word and gather around that Word as a family of believers for worship, service and fellowship (as described by our Congregation's Mission statement.)

The service Jesus attended was similar to the service you and I have come to participate in today. It included the singing of songs and Psalms, the speaking of prayers, the reading and explanation of Scripture.

What we are experiencing today is similar to what took place in the synagogue in Nazareth. The most important similarity is the fact that Jesus himself is present with us today. We remind ourselves of that fact every time we sing the hymn words: *Lord Jesus Christ, be present now, Our hearts in true devotion bow. Your Spirit send with grace divine, And let your truth within us shine.* Or as we sing: *God himself is present or God of mercy, God of grace, Show the brightness of your face, Shine upon us, Savior shine; Fill your Church with light divine.* We can sing in this way because Jesus himself has promised: (Matthew 18:20) **For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.** We have gathered together in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus is true God he is present with us today. He is with us always. And today the good news is still proclaimed to you.

As Jesus addressed the congregation in Nazareth he read from the book of Isaiah. God inspired the prophet to write these words – words in which God himself was speaking; words which were the words of God's chosen Savior. These were words which proclaimed good news to God's people – the same word's which we have heard today. God is present with us through his Word. That is why we pray:

**Lord, open now my heart to hear,
And through your Word to me draw near.
Let me your Word e'er pure retain;
Let me your child and heir remain.**

**Your Word inspires my heart within;
Your Word grants healing from my sin.
Your Word has pow'r to guide and bless;
Your Word brings peace and happiness.**

Today the good new is still preached to you. In our text Jesus read Isaiah's words which spoke of good news for God's people. **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed."**

It will help us to better appreciate the good news which these words proclaim to us when we understand the context of these words as they were first written by Isaiah. Isaiah had foretold that the Jews would be carried off into exile in Babylon. These words of Isaiah were written to assure the prisoners in exile that the Lord would bring about their release and freedom. But that was just part of the picture. The complete freedom, release and healing would come to God's people through the Savior. Jesus was sent by his heavenly Father to fulfill these words. The Lord was upon him. At his baptism Jesus was endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit before he began his preaching ministry. Now Jesus says that he has been anointed to preach good news to the poor. Jesus came to seek and to save sinners. He came to share the good news of salvation with those who are spiritually poor. We have come before the Lord today as spiritual beggars – confessing that have been disobedient in thoughts, words and actions and that we deserve the Lord's punishment both now and in eternity. We have come into God's presence with nothing but our sins. We have come as dirty empty vessels before God and we look to him to wash and fill our cups with the righteousness of Christ. And the Lord Jesus has good news for us: he is here **to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.**

These pictures help us to understand what Jesus has done for us. God's people were carted off to another land to live as exiles under the rule of a foreign government. All men were captives of Satan through sin. But Jesus brings them freedom from this captivity. This freedom and release is the same word as the Greek word for forgiveness. It tells us that Jesus sent our sins away – out of God's sight – forever.

Jesus also gives sight to the blind. Now those who were spiritually blind can see their sin, their rebellion, and their damning guilt. But more than that through the preaching of the good news they see their Savior. And as they see they also see themselves in a new light. When Jesus is revealed to them they see with rejoicing that they stand "pure and fresh and sinless in God's holy eyes!" (TLH 654:7) We rejoice to see ourselves in this way!

Jesus also provides us with a release from oppression. The Jews in Babylon were not only exiles in a strange land. There were oppressed under the rule of heathen kings. But even worse they were oppressed in spirit. The devout among them felt the weight and the guilt of the sins of their nation. What joy surged through their hearts when they were released and set free to return to their homeland with the city of Jerusalem which symbolized the dwelling place of their God. God was smiling on them again.

When our souls are aching and groaning under a load of sin and our conscience will not stop making us feel guilty our pastor speaks to us in Jesus name at the beginning of our service and assures us of his forgiveness. With the words of the final blessing I dismiss you to go forth with the joy and confidence that God is smiling upon you. What joy fills our hearts as the Lord lifts those burdens from us!

Yes, today God's favor is still declared to you once again. Isaiah spoke of Jesus announcing **the year of the Lord's favor** – the time of God's grace. Freed from the bondage of sin, we live under God's favor even as Adam and Eve did prior to the fall into sin. We have rest for our souls. We have eternal peace with God. We live as his children already now. And we look forward to the eternal rest of heaven.

These are the gracious blessings that our Lord shares with us through his word. What a wonderful privilege it is for us to come to his house and to realize that today his words are being fulfilled in us and for us. Next week our Gospel lesson will pick up where this one left off – we'll hear how Jesus listeners reacted to his message. How will you react to his message? Through his grace and by his word Christ comes to you, the good news is preached to you and God's favor is declared to you. Each and every time you come to this house of worship – it is true that Christ speaks to you and that the Word of God is fulfilled in your hearing. It is my prayer that you will react to Jesus message by believing it, applying it to your life and by returning to hear more next week. Amen.