

**Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – February 3, 2013**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

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**Luke 4:21-30**

And [Jesus] began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 22) All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. 23) Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" 24) "I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25) I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26) Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27) And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed--only Naaman the Syrian." 28) All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29) They got up, drove him 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. 30) But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Dear Friends:

Once again we have come into the presence of the Lord to be warned, encouraged and uplifted by his word. The opening words of our text will sound familiar to those of us who were here last week. They were spoken by Jesus in as he visited the local place of worship in his hometown of Nazareth. Jesus had just read a lesson from the book of Isaiah which foretold the coming of the Lord's "anointed one". Then Jesus claimed that he was the one that Isaiah was writing about by saying: "**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**" Our text reports the reaction of those who heard Jesus speak as it reminds us

**Theme:** Don't Treat the Word of Jesus Lightly

1. His Word alone offers the salvation we need
2. It is the Word of the Almighty God

Jesus revealed his glory through the message which he proclaimed in Nazareth. Those who were gathered there for worship heard Jesus preaching good news, proclaiming freedom from the captivity of sin and Satan and announcing God's grace. They were hearing the kind of words which Isaiah foretold would be spoken by the promised Savior. What they had just heard was evidence that Isaiah had been speaking about Jesus – the one who would save sinners from sin and damnation by dying in our place. It was Jesus' hope not just to convince them to recognize with their minds that he was the one Isaiah was talking about but more importantly to win their hearts. And that is what Jesus desires for us as well. He doesn't just want us to say with our mind that he is the promised Savior. He wants his word to work faith in our hearts – faith which will then display itself in our lives by the things we say and do.

The things the people in Nazareth said and did revealed that these people were not convinced and did not believe that Jesus was their Savior. **All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.** The people were impressed but couldn't get past the fact that Jesus was one of their own and so they ended up treating Jesus word lightly – they refused to accept that Word without the additional confirmation of some of the miracles like he had done in Capernaum.

But it is the word alone which offers the salvation we need. On another occasion Jesus used the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus to remind his listeners of the power of the Word alone. In that parable the

Rich man was reminded that "If his brothers refused to listen to **Moses and the Prophets**, they would not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

The words that Jesus spoke in the synagogue which the people took so lightly told of God's love and help for those who deserve only his anger and punishment. We would say that he was telling the people about God's grace. The Jews spoke well of Jesus and thought that his words sounded good and that Jesus had something wonderful to offer – but immediately they rejected the offer as being too good to be true. This was "their" Jesus-- the one who grew up in their town in the household of Mary and Joseph and they concluded that it simply could not be possible that the promised Savior could come from such humble roots. He was just another human being to them. They saw only what they wanted to see. And so their unbelief took over in their hearts.

Many today have this very same problem. People are willing to acknowledge that Jesus was a wonderful teacher and a good example for us to follow as we live our lives – but they stop short of calling him the very Son of God who came into the world to set sinners free from the condemnation they deserved because of sin. They recognize that the Bible speaks about Jesus but believe it is a book written by men who might have exaggerated what happened or made other mistakes. They see Christians who talk about receiving blessings from Jesus who don't appear to be any better off than other people. They may even be poor; they get sick and die so they jump to the false conclusion that they can't be God's children. We need to be careful so that we do not let our reason and the outward appearance of things get in the way of our faith in God's gracious promises.

Faith does not come from seeing! It comes from hearing, as Romans 10:17 reminds us: **Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.** And so Jesus continued to speak his words of warning to the Jews. Jesus continued to reveal his glory as he revealed to them that he knew the thoughts of their hearts. He pointed out the hardness of their hearts as a loving warning. Ultimately he would demonstrate his almighty power to them as a reminder that his Words are the Word of the Almighty God.

Jesus spoke about the times of Elijah and Elisha to the people in his home town. Elijah and Elisha lived at a time when God's people had turned their back on him. The people followed the godless ways of their rulers. The Lord send his prophets – men like Elijah and Elisha to warn the people and their rulers to turn from their sinful ways. But the people treated the Words of the Lord lightly and so God allowed his people to suffer under his hand – depriving them of his divine blessings. Yet he willingly showed his compassion to individuals like the widow from Zarephath in the region of Sidon who gladly listen to the word of the Lord and happily provided for Elijah during a time of famine and drought by making sure her limited supply of flour and oil never ran out. God even enabled Elijah to call her son back to life from the dead.

It was a young Jewish slave girl who urged her master, Naaman, to seek out the prophet Elisha for healing of his leprosy. In spite of his initial reluctance Naaman ultimately obeyed the Word of the Lord and was healed.

Jesus showed that when people don't believe that they miss out on the blessings the Lord wants to give them. Those who believe regardless of who they are or where they live are blessed. It's as if Jesus is pleading with them and us: "Don't hurt yourselves by not believing." You have God's word – believe what it says about me. That's the message Jesus so lovingly shares with the Jews who were rejecting him.

In addition to revealing his glory by pointing out the hardness of their hearts as a loving warning, Jesus used his power to set aside their sinful plans.

**All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29) They got up, drove him 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.**

Jesus' words had struck a nerve with these people. They were insulted when Jesus reminded them that God gives his grace where and when he desires. They didn't want to hear that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They still wanted to claim God's favor on the basis of their own merits rather than as a gift of God. Their actions serve as a reminder to us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought but to humble ourselves before God and each other as we thank God for the marvelous gift of his Son to be our Savior.

The Jews in Nazareth did not listen to Jesus and his words of warning. They became angry with Jesus and they let their anger become so fierce that they tried to kill Jesus by pushing him off a high hill. Here we have a warning about the dangers of allowing anger to gain a foot hold in our hearts and minds.

In a demonstration of his divine power our text tells us **that [Jesus] walked right through the crowd and went on his way.** Jesus made use of his divine power at this time because this was not the time, the place or the way that his Father had chosen for him to lay down his life for the sins of the people. And here we are reminded that God will always accomplish his will.

Once again Jesus has revealed his word to us. And once again it's appropriate for us to ask ourselves a question. How will I react to this message? Will we take his word to heart or will we take it lightly? The answer becomes obvious when we consider that it is the word alone that offers salvation and that his word is the Word of the almighty God.

May we heed the warnings against unbelief and sin which Jesus has shared with us today and may we rely on him as our Savior from sin with the confidence that he will use the power of his Word to keep us faithful to him, to enable us to resist sin, and to protect us from all danger of body and soul. Let us pray that his word will work faith in our hearts – faith which will then display itself in our lives by the things we say and do. Amen.