

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I don't know if you noticed the theme of today's sermon printed in our bulletin. "Guest preacher today: Jesus." I hope you weren't *too* disappointed to see me walking up to the pulpit and not Jesus. The sermon is titled such because today in our Gospel lesson, we have recorded for an instance when Jesus *was* the guest preacher. What was his sermon like? What did he preach about? What was the reaction of the crowd? All of these fascinating details are recorded for us today. But of primary importance for us is to examine the content of his sermon. Because although Jesus isn't physically standing before you preaching today, the message he shared in that synagogue 2000 years ago, is the very same message he preaches to us today. Jesus has some important words for you today... he has a message of good news, freedom, release and God's favor.

As you know, we are in the season of the church year called Epiphany. It's a word that means to appear or manifest or reveal. What have we seen revealed thus far in the Epiphany season? Well, we've seen the wisemen show up in Bethlehem, revealing that this child is the long promises Messiah and Savior... Savior not just of the Jews, but of the whole world. We've heard the story of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan river, where the Father and the Holy Spirit revealed this was God's Son. Jesus' mission of salvation had begun. Last week, we heard of Jesus first miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding of Cana. Jesus revealed by his power that he truly was the Son of God, possessing the power of God. Today, is another revelation, another "epiphany" about Jesus. And it's made in the sermon he preached. Let's listen now to the time when Jesus was guest preacher at the synagogue in Nazareth. The story begins like this:

Luke 4:14-21

**14 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 [he would read from.]**

Jesus returned to Galilee (he had been preaching and teaching in other areas of Israel). His return to Galilee wasn't a quiet event which no one noticed. Jesus returned in the power of the Holy Spirit. He had been anointed and commissioned at his baptism. Now with the help of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had begun his teaching ministry. News of Jesus spread all around the area. It's interesting to note that Luke mentions nothing of Jesus performing miracles at this time. Why, then, was there so much talk about Jesus? Verse 15 tells us that it was his **teaching** which caused people to praise him. In many places, Scripture says that people were amazed when they listened to Jesus teach. He didn't have hesitations, or doubts, or second thoughts as he preached God's Word. He wasn't boring. He didn't philosophize. Most amazing, Jesus was never caught off guard by a question. He never fumbled through a half thought-out answer. In short, Jesus' teaching was amazing because Jesus spoke as one having **authority**.

Our text says, "*On the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.*" Jesus'

normal behavior was to keep the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment – **always**. We often talk of Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, but just as important for our salvation was that fact that he lived a perfect life in our place and on our behalf. Our text makes it clear that Jesus always kept the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment by regular attendance at the synagogue. And we might ask ourselves this as well... if Jesus considered it vitally important to be in church every week, shouldn't we also?

So Jesus went into the synagogue. What is a synagogue? The synagogue was very important in Jewish religious life. During the exile when most of the Jews had been deported to Babylon, the Jews no longer had a temple. Synagogues were established as places of worship on the Sabbath. They were also used as places of instruction. Even after the Jews returned to Israel and the temple was rebuilt, they still continued the custom of meeting in synagogues. Synagogues had one leader who had an assistant.

The worship service in the Jewish synagogue was very similar to what we still use today. Psalms were sung and prayers were spoken. A selection from one of the first five books of the bible, the ones written by Moses, was usually read. Then usually a selection from one of the books of the prophets like Jeremiah or Isaiah or Ezekiel, etc. was also read. These selections were then explained in some sort of a sermon. Usually the one in charge of the bible scrolls would request several people to read the readings and speak - usually a rabbi or another teacher, but if anyone would stand up while that whole process was taking place then they were volunteering their services. It seems that this is what Jesus did and he was readily granted permission to read the reading and preach.

The original listeners to Jesus sermon literally hung on his every word. Imagine that crowded synagogue that day. The hush that fell over the crowd as the sacred scroll was brought forward. A hush must have fallen over the crowd as he unrolled the scroll deliberately looking for the exact scripture he had in mind. He read the words from Isaiah 61. He wanted to read this specific Scripture because it did two things: it highlighted the people's need. And it highlighted what he came to do. And truth is, we have the very same needs as Jesus' original audience, and what Jesus came to do applies to us just as much as it applied to them. So today, Jesus will be our guest preacher with exactly the message we need to hear today.

After reading the text, **“The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** The bomb was dropped. Jesus was not only going to share a message from God with these people that day... he would not only convey God's truth to them... but he tells them he is the one who fulfills that Word of God. He is the anointed one spoken of in that text. He not only speaks God's Word, but he IS God's Word. He not only conveys God's promise, he IS God's promise. And this is true for us today every bit as much as it was true for them. Let's look at those Word's from Isaiah and see how Jesus was the fulfillment.

Jesus read the following words: *18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.*

This prophecy from Isaiah is written in the first person. It was originally spoken to exiled Israel. The people had been taken captive to the city of Babylon. They longed for release. They longed to return to the land of Israel. With the words Jesus read, Isaiah had brought good news to these captives. But was he foretelling their release from captivity, or was he foretelling a much greater event: the coming of the Messiah? It seems Isaiah was directly prophesying the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah's words speak of greater things than just a return from captivity. Israel was restored, but even after their return from captivity, they were still an oppressed people. They never did return to the glory of Davidic times. Isaiah must have been referring to the future time when the

Messiah would come.

18 *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.*

Jesus was anointed or set apart to help poor people. But poor people" is not referring to those who are homeless or who stand in line at soup kitchens. The poor are those who are poor in spirit. He came to help those who stand before God knowing full well they are spiritually bankrupt, with an unpayable debt to God caused by countless sins and offenses. When Judgment Day comes, we stand before God penniless when it comes to the righteousness and holiness he requires. The poor in spirit realize they deserve nothing from God except anger and punishment.

We might pause here a second and ask, "But aren't all spiritually poor? So wasn't Jesus anointed to preach good news to all people?" It is true that all are bankrupt before God. But many don't acknowledge it or believe it. Many believe that they have sufficient righteousness, sufficient good works to pay their way into heaven. They see themselves as rich, and so they certainly won't accept any handouts from Jesus. Such people are not prepared to hear what Jesus has to say. He has no good news for such people.

Now, how about you? Are you poor? Wiped out? Penniless before God? Do you acknowledge your righteousness amounts to nothing more than a pile of filthy rags? Our guest preacher, Jesus, stands before you today with some very good news. *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."* Jesus came to our world to fill up our bank account. Not with something as worthless as gold or silver. He fills up our spiritual bank account with the righteousness and holiness that God requires of us. He took our spiritual poverty upon himself, taking our place. And from him we become rich, having all we need for eternal life with God. That is good news Jesus preaches to us poor people today!

Jesus also read these words from Isaiah:

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners*

Jesus also came *"to proclaim freedom for the prisoners."* This term literally means "prisoners of war." Back then there was no Geneva Convention dictating how prisoners of war were to be treated. They were at the mercy of whoever captured them, and often they were treated cruelly and brutally. This is a good description of how we are by nature. We are captured by Satan and imprisoned by sin. We cannot escape. We are caught in a sinful world with sinful lives where this much suffering and little hope.

But Jesus proclaims freedom! With his holy, precious blood Jesus bought us back from Satan's prison. Jesus paid the ransom that was necessary for our release. Sin, death and the devil no longer have any claim to us. We are redeemed by the blood of God's own Son.

Jesus also restores *"sight for the blind."* Sin has blinded us to the proper way to attain union with God. We see none of his glory or light. But Jesus through his Gospel shows that the way to God is through him. He is *the way, the truth and the life* [Jn 14:6]. He opens our eyes and gives us sight and we are in awe of God's glory and love.

Jesus also came *"to release the oppressed."* The guilt of our sins often weighs heavy upon us. It oppresses us. We feel trapped under our sin and see no way out. Through his work in our place he removed the guilt of the sins that weigh so heavy upon us. He has set us free.

Isaiah wrote that the Messiah would *"proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* He seems to be alluding to the Year of Jubilee [Leviticus 25:8ff]. This was a special year that would occur every 50 years. In this year, all slaves were freed, all property was returned to its original owners and all debts were canceled. In a very real sense, debts of every kind were forgiven in that year. This special year was a clear foreshadowing of the unconditional, complete and undeserved forgiveness

that would come through the Messiah. The time period beginning with Jesus' arrival on earth and continuing until He comes again in glory is one long year of Jubilee for God's children. Jesus has forgiven every spiritual debt that we owe through his perfect life and innocent death.

What a blessed message we have heard today from our guest preacher, Jesus. He has revealed something amazing: he is the one who fulfills the prophecies of Scripture. All of God's promises to Old Testament believers are completed in him. Jesus has delivered a message to us today that gives great hope, peace and joy. You are rich. You are free. You are released. You are under God's favor. What is your response to this? Believe! Rejoice! Serve God with all your time, talents and treasures. And finally, share this sermon of Jesus that you heard today with everyone you can. May his name be praised by more and more. Amen.

"The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" [Philippians 4:7] Amen.