

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

Listen to the Word

Luke 4:16-30

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." 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.

Have you ever tried to talk to someone who is thoroughly engrossed in a television program? It's almost impossible to get your message across to that person because they are too busy concentrating on the TV. This is only one roadblock to communication. There are many others. Sometimes it has to do with the person delivering the message. There are certain people that you just don't like to listen to so you tune them out. Other times, it has to do with the person receiving the message. They are distracted by someone or something else and don't want to listen. As we look at our Gospel reading today, we see Jesus as the Messenger of God. He speaks the Word clearly and with authority. There is no problem with his message. The problem comes with those who hear his Word. Learning from their negative example, this morning we are encouraged to always listen to the Word of God with believing hearts.

Our reading today takes place in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. The word of his miracles had spread throughout the region, and now the local boy was returning home. While he was there, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. In the synagogue, Jesus read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. It wasn't by accident that he chose these verses. This was the message that the people needed to hear on that day. 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.*" After Jesus read from the scroll, he sat down to teach the people. They seemed very interested in what he had to say.

Here was Jesus, a man whom they knew as a boy, but was now regarded as a great teacher. They listened intently as he said, *“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”* No doubt Jesus said more than just those words. Jesus expounded the Scriptures to the congregation and showed how the words of the prophet Isaiah pointed to him. How did the congregation react? We read that *“All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.”* The message that came from Jesus was full of grace and impressed everyone who heard it.

This is no the end of the story, however. No matter how impressed the people were with Jesus’ message, they had a problem. They couldn’t get over the fact that these gracious words were coming from Jesus, whom they saw grow up in their midst. They asked, *“Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”* Jesus knew what they were implying. They felt that it just wasn’t possible for the son of a carpenter from their town could be the Messiah, spoken of in the Scriptures. That is why Jesus rebuked them, saying, *“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.’”* Jesus knew the people wanted some further proof before they would believe that he was the Messiah. The Word was not enough for them. They wanted more. They wanted miracles to convince them.

Jesus would not give them those miracles because he knew their hearts. He knew they were rejecting the message as well as him, the Messenger. As he said, *“No prophet is accepted in his hometown.”* He then gave the people two illustrations from the Scriptures. The first illustration comes from the life of the prophet Elijah. When there was a severe famine in the land, Elijah went to stay with a widow from Zarephath. And the Lord miraculously sustained Elijah and that widow for three years. The other illustration is the healing of the Syrian King Naaman. In both these cases the Lord performed miracles for foreigners and not his own people, who had rejected him. The message for the congregation was clear: If you reject me, I will perform my ministry elsewhere and others will receive my blessing. Of course, the people didn’t like to hear what Jesus had to say to them. They didn’t like it so much that they took Jesus out and tried to throw him from a cliff. But Jesus walked right through the people and left Nazareth.

We have to be careful that we do not treat God’s Word the same way the people of Nazareth did. They were not willing to listen. In their case, the problem was with Jesus and the fact that he grew up in Nazareth. We find our own reasons not to listen to God’s Word. We might find a problem with the person who is speaking God’s Word. So we refuse to listen to what he or she has to say even if it is in line with God’s Word. We might find other reasons not to listen to the Word. Maybe we think we know it already, so we don’t need to hear it again. Maybe we have too many distractions in our everyday life—so God’s Word takes a back seat. Other things are more important at the moment. We are sinning when we neglect or despise God’s Word or the ones who are proclaiming it.

The warning found in Jesus’ words to the people of Nazareth applies to us as well. If we reject or refuse to listen to the Word of God, how long will it be before God will take his word elsewhere? Certainly we pray that this would never happen. But the mere thought of losing the Word among us leads us to dive back into the Word and appreciate what a treasure we have in the Scriptures.

What is the message that the Word proclaims? The central message of the Scriptures is the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is the gospel. It is the message that brings freedom to those enslaved in sin and release

for those imprisoned by the devil and his lies. The people of Nazareth desperately needed to hear this good news, but rejected it for a foolish reason.

The people in Capernaum had the right idea. We read in the verses following our text that “*They were amazed at his teaching because his message had authority.*” The message had authority. It wasn’t the person speaking the message that gave it authority. It wasn’t the fact that Jesus had performed miracles in their midst that gave the message authority. The authority was in the message itself. The authority was in the fact that Jesus was speaking God’s Word and God’s Word is authoritative.

You also recognize that God’s Word has authority in your life. You know the power of Word. It is the Word together with the water that planted the seed of faith in your heart. It is the Word that speaks forgiveness and peace when you need to hear it. It is the Word that strengthens your faith and serves as a lamp to your feet, guiding your footsteps and the way you live so that you can live more and more like Christ. It is the Word that assures you that the bread and wine you are about to eat is not merely that—bread and wine—but is also the very body and blood of Christ, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. What a blessing it is to know and recognize the authority of God’s Word as it speaks to our hearts.

Recognizing that the Word itself has this authority leads us to two conclusions. First, we need to let the message speak. Now is the time for us to get rid of the distractions and stop making the excuses to not hear and read God’s Word. Now is the time for us to once again dedicate ourselves to mining the depths of this treasure God has given us. Jesus amazed the congregation with one reading from the book of Isaiah. There are so many more passages for us to read and discover which can and will impact our lives. The other conclusion we can draw is that we don’t need to be afraid to speak the Word. The Word is what carries the authority, not us. At times, people accept the message. At times, they reject it. That is beyond our control. Our goal is to simply get the Word out to as many people as possible.

As we look at Jesus’ work in Nazareth and today, we see clearly that Jesus’ work was all about the message of the Scriptures and proclaiming that message no matter what the reception. It is our goal to make our lives all about the message. This means regularly hearing and reading the Scriptures and not being afraid to share the Scriptures with others. Thank God for the gift he has given us in his authoritative Word. **Amen.**

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