

Not Just Another Service

3rd Sun. after Epiphany – 01/26/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 4:16-30 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 18-19 [Where Jesus read the words of Isaiah 61 in the worship service,] **“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.”**

v.21 [Jesus proclaims (literally from the Greek),] **“...today this Scripture has been fulfilled in all of your ears.”**

I. Our sinful nature rebels against God's Word

✘ Friends, why are you even here right now? It's an honest and sincere question, Why are you here? I mean, it's not like you haven't been here before. And you already know what to expect. This is just another church service. “What difference does it make?” “It's the same thing every Sunday.”

→ Even if we never say it, that's what our old sinful nature thinks. It's why we sometimes find it to be such a chore to drag our feet to come to church. It's why it's so much easier to make a habit out of something – anything else – on Sunday morning. Look, we all have so many important things to do in life. And each of those things requires a certain amount of time and effort.

→ And since I already know about and love and believe in Jesus ... and I already know that the same old pastor is just going to say the same things I've heard about Jesus a thousand times before ... well, of course I'm going to be okay with less Jesus, rather than more, right? It's the same with my daily devotions; with my time in prayer; with my commitment to Bible Study.

✘ Let's just be honest, you know your sinful nature doesn't want you to be here right now. But ... you also know you can't trust that sinful nature, can you?

→ That's why it's called our sinful nature, because it's entire purpose and goal is to keep you and me out of God's Word and away from Jesus. That's why this whole church thing can be such a fight. You are always up against yourself to make it here. Yet, God created us and saved us so that Sunday worship and hearing God's Word should be the most natural thing in the world for us, but it isn't.

II. Eyes fixed on Jesus

✘ It's not natural for us sinful beings, but it is for Jesus. Verse 16, “He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day.” How about that? And the Holy Scripture is His own Word!

→ Yet as a child, Jesus studied and learned it by heart. And now as an adult, He's living it out; fully devoted to it. It's His custom. His habit is to love the Word. So He attends the Sabbath worship faithfully. What would that be like? To come to church not as a duty or a burden; not because you feel like you “have to” do it, or simply as a matter of routine, not even because we need it (though let's not kid ourselves, we do need it so long as that sinful nature refuses to leave us) – but to come to worship; to church out of pure love and eagerness to be here! That's the life of Jesus.

✘ He's the one who told the devil, when He was being tempted in the wilderness, only a few days earlier in verse four, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone’” “but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mat. 4:4). This is the guy described by Psalm 1:1-3 that says, “Blessed is the man” – Jesus – “His delight is in the law (i.e. the Word) of the Lord, and on His

law He meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.” Yes, it was normal; it was natural for Jesus to be in church; to hold God’s Word “sacred”; and to “gladly hear and learn it”, as Martin Luther teaches in the Small Catechism (3rd Commandment).

- ✘ But this Sabbath Day here in our Gospel Reading today was different from others. This time Jesus didn’t come to the synagogue in Nazareth just because He was “the (earthly) son of Joseph” (v. 22). He’d already done that – been the obedient son and an upstanding citizen of Nazareth for 30 years.

→ This time He wasn’t there to be a hearer of the Word. This time He came to His hometown synagogue as a teacher of the Word; a rabbi; a guest preacher in His home congregation. He came not as the “son of Joseph” but as the Son of God, the Father in heaven. “And he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.” In other words, this was the prepared, pre-assigned text for the day, just as we have here in our services each Sunday.

→ So, “He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ‘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’” (vv. 16–19).

- ✘ I’ve actually done this before, gone back to and preached at the church where I grew up in Ft. Collins. It was certainly different for those who remembered me as a little rug rat running around the church and chasing my friends. They told just that.

→ The home folks in Nazareth, they had never seen this side of Jesus before. They’d never heard Him like this. So whether they came that day out of habit or obligation or even out of love for the Word, they got more than they expected. This wasn’t just another service, according to custom – go through the motions and head home. When Jesus “rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down” verse 20 says that “the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.” What a great description. All eyes in the church are fixed on Jesus. No dozing in the pew after a late night; no daydreaming about the NFL playoff games later today; no furtive glances at a phone or watch to see how long the sermon’s going to last. Wouldn’t it be great if those words described us here today? “Jesus came and the eyes of all were fixed on Him!”

III. Jesus is the Word of God fulfilled

- ✘ His “sermon” was just what a sermon is supposed to be. It wasn’t a lecture on theology or a list of 10 steps to a better you or a rally for some social or political issue.

→ Now, in a simple and profound way, Jesus just applied God’s Word to the people here and now; before their very eyes: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in all of your ears” (v. 21). What Jesus is saying is this, “These words in Isaiah ... they are about Me.” It is a very physical, right-before-your-eyes-and-ears experience that Jesus brings to these people in worship that day. It’s as if the words of the prophet stepped right off the page and stood in front of them – like one of those movies where the characters of a book come to life as the words are read. Except this was no fairy tale or story. This was all real – a real scroll; the real Jesus with real words from His mouth, into the real ears of His hearers! He brings God’s Word in four dimensions, in time and space.

- ✘ How? because Jesus is the Word in human flesh – the Word that’s living and active; present here in this place for you! Yes, the Spirit of the Lord is upon Him – only a month or so earlier the dove settled upon Him from heaven. He is the Anointed One (since His baptism); the promised Messiah, Christ. That’s why He went to the synagogue that Sabbath Day, and the people – they couldn’t believe their ears! Verse 22, “All spoke well of Him and marveled at the gracious words

that were coming from His mouth. And they said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?'" No, not really. Truly, He is "the Son of God" (Lk. 1:35), conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the Virgin Mary.

→ That's why He comes (present tense) to church so faithfully still today, for the same five reasons that Isaiah said He would come: 1) to deliver the Good News of salvation to you poor and needy sinners; 2) to proclaim liberty to you who are held captive to your sinful nature; 3) to give sight to you who are blind in the darkness of this corrupt world; 4) to set free you who are oppressed by the pressures of your family and peers and more, and 5) to proclaim the grace-filled news that the Jubilee Year of the Lord has begun; the time of His salvation by grace.

→ Just as it was in Nazareth, so it is right now today my dear Christians. It is all happening literally "in your ears." That's how Jesus makes Himself and His forgiveness known to you. As St. Paul said in Romans 10:17: "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ."

✘ It's real! It's here, right now! Today this same Word from Holy Scripture is fulfilled again: Jesus, the Christ, comes here physically with the Lord's favor "in your ears" ... for you!

IV. Jesus never tires of being present in His Word

✘ You see, that's the point of every Sunday! Flesh-and-blood Jesus; true God and also true man ... He steps into our worship. Look, Jesus never grows tired of doing this. He loves to fulfill His Word again and again; to be the Word for poor, lost sinners like you and me. So, this Sunday; next Sunday; and every Sunday isn't about you and what you're doing here, though it's good and important that you are. What matters is that He is here – here for the depressed and despairing; for the sinner and the sinned against; for all who are oppressed; victimized; abused; taken advantage of; and suffering. Yes, Jesus is the answer to the prayer we prayed earlier in the Collect of the Day: "Stretch forth the hand of Your majesty to heal and defend us."

✘ But not all who hear believe. Just look at the people in Jesus' hometown. What do they want with Jesus? Apparently not the good news He proclaims, the liberty He brings, the sight He restores, or the freedom He promises.

→ They want Him dead. So they drive Him out of town and up to the cliff that Nazareth is built upon. They want the Anointed One crushed for them, bruised and wounded, stricken, smitten, and afflicted. That hill wasn't Calvary, but it was close.

→ Jesus came to be that Word, too, the despised, rejected, crucified Word. He came to suffer for our sins; for the way that we've groaned about hearing His Word; for our indifference to the Word; for the times we've allowed ourselves to be distracted or enticed away from it. And instead of taking His Word away and leaving us without hope or help, Jesus still continues to come. He comes and He extends the Father's favor to us again. He doesn't have to be here. He doesn't have to do this. He doesn't need what we give Him – our sins, our prayers, our offerings. But He wants them, because He loves us all. So, He comes, week after week, service after service, forgiving, loving, showing mercy to us, because we are the ones who need Him ... every day!

V. Not just another service – It's a joy...

✘ You see, the joy of life here in Christ's church is that it's never just another service. Every single week is a little Christmas; another Epiphany! Jesus Himself is the rabbi, our teacher whose Word proclaims God's favor and grace. And He's more than that. He is God with us; right here in our midst; visiting us with His mercy and grace. And that's why we want to be here even when we can't. Psalm 84:1-2 expresses our hearts well, "How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord."

→ I guess we're not just the old, sinful nature after all, because since our baptism we can tell the devil to get out; to stop harassing you; because Jesus is here. You've got a new master. It's Jesus in us who drags us out of bed – sometimes kicking and screaming into the pew – so that we can receive His gifts this week anew; so the Word can be fulfilled again in our hearing; so His forgiveness and life can fill us now! More than that, He's the one who leads our worship to rejoice in His Word, to say, "What, only one service this week?" because He always wants more for us.

⊗ That's just the way Jesus is – always in church; always in His Word; always flesh and blood; always crucified and risen for you; always with more forgiveness to speak, until that day when the sinful nature is dead and buried forever.

→ Then ... oh then on that day, we will be forever with the Lord, and yes, we will love every moment of it. Amen.