

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Third Sunday after Epiphany, January 26, 2014

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 27, 37:1, 352, 356:1-6, 356:7.

Lessons: Isaiah 61:1-6, 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27, Luke 4:13-30.

Sermon Text: Luke 4:14-22.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This event is near the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, which didn't begin until he was about 30 years old. Jesus is in his hometown. Today he goes to the synagogue he likely had attended many times. He is among people who know him, who saw him grow up, and who commented "*Isn't this Joseph's son?*" (Luke 4:22)

But they really didn't know Jesus. They thought they knew him, but when he reveals himself he's not the person they thought he was. It even happens today that some people who think they know Jesus don't really know who Jesus is because they don't know or don't pay attention to or don't listen to the words of Jesus and the message of Jesus. Some people today think Jesus is only a great prophet. Some people today only know some of the words that Jesus spoke. Some don't think that Jesus would condemn sin. Some think of Jesus as only "love" – meaning some kind of sentimental toleration of all people and all activities that men want to do – including tolerance for all manner of sin. They don't recognize Jesus as God's son, the Savior of all mankind, who preached both law and Gospel.

We know who Jesus is. We know he is the Son of God. By the power of the Holy Spirit working faith in us, we have come to know Jesus Christ as our Savior from all our sins. From the Word of God in front of us today, we see that

JESUS BEGINS TO REVEAL HIMSELF AS THE PROMISED SAVIOR, THE MESSIAH

- 1. He reads the Scriptures in the synagogue in Nazareth.**
- 2. He tells the people "*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*"**
- 3. At first, people spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words he spoke.**

Cana, where he had performed his first miracle as you heard last week, was less than ten miles from Nazareth. The news concerning him spread throughout the region and preceded him wherever he went and made the people eager to see and hear him. Some wanted to see Jesus perform miracles and heal people.

Because working miracles was not the most important part of his work, he took up his work of proclaiming the Gospel to his fellow Jews. He taught in their synagogues. He tried to teach them about the coming of the kingdom of God. And – at first – he was highly praised by all, for people recognized the power of his preaching, and some at least acknowledged that God must have sent this prophet.

Nazareth in Galilee had been his home for almost thirty years. There he had been brought up. There he had received his education on earth. There he had worked at the trade of carpenter, together with his foster-father Joseph. Now he came to his home town as a teacher or rabbi. When the Sabbath came, he followed his usual custom of going to the synagogue.

In the synagogue the Scriptures were read while the speaker was standing in front of the group, who was also standing. After excerpts from the law and from the prophets were read, they all sat down and the speaker, the teacher, the rabbi explained the portion that had been read. The leader of the synagogue had charge of the service. He himself either read the scriptures and explained them, or requested others to take his place. When Jesus stood up, this was a sign that he was offering his services. They handed him the scroll of the prophet

Isaiah. It was a courtesy which was willingly granted visiting rabbis that they could read one of the lessons and then give a few remarks in explanation. This was the "talk", which served much like our sermon. When Jesus arose, the leader of the synagogue took out of the ark, or case, in which the sacred writings were kept the scroll of parchment on which the prophecies of Isaiah were written. It was fastened at either end to an ornamental rod or pole. Today most Old Testament scrolls are about two feet tall. As the reading was continued, the parchment was rolled up at the one end and unrolled at the other, with only a small space of the written text being visible between the two end rolls. The reader slowly read the Hebrew, which was at once translated into Aramaic, the common spoken language of the people. As Jesus now rolled the scroll apart, he came to the text from Isaiah 61 and he 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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."***

Through the guidance of God, his father, his choice of Scriptures was a description that was to characterize his entire ministry. It was a text which was especially fitting for what appears to be Jesus' first sermon recorded in Scripture. It described perfectly the work of the Messiah. When Jesus speaks of the Spirit of the Lord, he is talking about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost is the person of the triune God who brings the word of God to us, as we read in 2 Peter 1:21: ***"For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."***

The Spirit of the Lord rests upon Jesus, because he has been anointed with the Holy Ghost, including at his baptism. He is Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One. Acts 10:38 reminds us ***"how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him."***

Jesus was anointed, appointed, sent to preach good news to the poor. This speaks of the poor, broken hearted, captives, blind, bruised, to are all who are spiritually poor. This is not a deliverance from exile under a political power, which happens to be the Romans. This is a deliverance from spiritual bondage.

To the poor he preaches the Gospel. He proclaims hope to those who feel the depth and hopelessness of their spiritual poverty. With Christ they will find the true riches that last throughout eternity. Jesus has been sent to heal those whose hearts were broken, who felt the wounds of sin. He gives them the Gospel of healing. He came to preach deliverance to the captives, that is, to those who were held bound by the power of sin and the fear of the devil. He sets them free from the enemies who have held their souls in their power. He gives sight to the blind, that their eyes may no longer be captive in the darkness of unbelief. He grants the liberty of the children of God to those who were slaves of their own lusts as they were led by the devil and their own flesh. And all of this together meant for all men ***"the year of the Lord's favor," "the acceptable year of the Lord"*** as we read in the King James Version.

The symbolism is derived from the year of Jubilee, every 50th year. In Leviticus 25:10 we read ***"Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan."*** Through this year God had ordained a reestablishment of the social order every 50 years. Every Israelite who had been sold into slavery was then restored to liberty. Those imprisoned on account of their debts were released. Any person who had been compelled to sell his inheritance was given full possession again. All this is a picture of spiritual liberty, relief from sin and guilt, and being given possession again of mankind's divine inheritance. And it is received through faith.

Isaiah writes of it in this way: ***"This is what the LORD says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances,"*** (Isaiah 49:8)

Jesus makes application of this as the time in which all debts of sins and trespasses are forgiven, in which all the blessings of God's heritage which were lost through sin, are recovered.

"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, and he began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'. 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."

When Jesus had finished reading the lesson, he rolled the parchment together again and then returned it to the leader of the synagogue, who had charge of the sacred books. The written Scriptures were very precious to the Jews, and every synagogue took the best care of its copies. In addition to being the very Word of God as God had had it recorded by his prophets, each scroll was a carefully hand-written manuscript.

He then sat down. During the reading of the Scripture-lesson, both the congregation and the reader stood. But during the talk, or sermon, the speaker as well as the audience were seated. His reading had made such an impression upon all those present that all eyes were fixed upon him in anxious expectation. Their interest had been aroused.

Luke gives only the topic or the beginning of the Lord's sermon: "***Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.***" That is the heart of the sermon. Jesus tells them that the One who spoke these words through Isaiah stands today, at this moment, before your eyes. The promised Messiah has stepped into your midst. And then Jesus invited them to come to him with humble and contrite hearts, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled not only in their ears, but also in their hearts. The Lord preached repentance and forgiveness of sins.

The effect of Christ's sermon is shown. They were surprised at the words of grace which came from his mouth.

How Jesus interpreted this passage has not been written down by the evangelists. So we do not have Jesus' exact interpretation or explanation of these words. However, we do know what all of Scripture tells us about Jesus and his work. Today we must be reminded to remember that Jesus came to fulfill the Scriptures. Everything that was written about him in the Scriptures must be fulfilled.

When Jesus speaks he speaks truth. When Jesus speaks he speaks facts. The fact that we must remember today is that we too are among the poor, the spiritually blind, the sin-sick, the wounded who need this kind of healing. But do not think merely of a physical healing despite all the physical ailments that you might have. Think of spiritual healing.

Remember the marvelous things God has done for you. He sent his only son Jesus Christ to carry the burden of our sins to the cross. In that way he takes away the sins of all mankind. And because he takes away the sins of all mankind, all mankind has the opportunity to live – to live eternally. The only thing standing between them and the fulfillment of that kind of life, eternal life in heaven, is unbelief. Faith comes from hearing the word of God.

What a marvelous thing this could have been for the people gathered in that synagogue! What a great day this could have been! If only these people had truly recognized Jesus as who and what he truly is! He tells them "***Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.***" The age of the Messiah has come. The servant of the Lord has come to redeem you from all your sins.

He himself was that servant of the Lord who had been anointed with the Holy Spirit. His ministry was to preach and teach and heal, and especially to save mankind from sin. But these were people who had known Jesus for a long time. These were people in his hometown. They had not known this man to be a miracle worker when he was growing up among them.

Gradually the implications of what Jesus was saying struck home. They didn't want to hear this kind of preaching from someone whom they thought they already knew. Their sinful flesh didn't appreciate what Jesus was about to say about the words of Isaiah.

In our next sermon, we shall see how these people rejected Jesus, and even tried to kill him. But today, let us close with and remember that Jesus is the one who came to redeem poor, sinful mankind from their sins. Believe that and receive eternal life! Amen.