

St. Luke 4:16-21

Dear Friends in Christ,

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due penalty of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong," And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Lk. 23:39-43)

I know that what I just read seems out of place relative to our text, but you've got to stay with me on this. The Word Himself hangs there, between two *chiefs* of sinners, and does what the Word does: speaks, reveals. It was His mission. Still is. It's about . . .

HIS APPEARANCE, THE REVEALING, AND US

I. The Appearance.

I'm calling this part of the sermon "His Appearance" as implied in our text: "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read." (v. 16) It's imperative to note that point: "...as was his custom, he went to the synagogue..." *His custom!*

Backing up to the St. Matthew's Gospel, the fourth chapter, we are told: "And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people." (Matt. 4:23) *Went throughout...teaching in their synagogues.*

The worship of the synagogue was liturgical. Defined: "In a wider sense the term (Liturgy) denotes the whole system of formal worship." (Erwin L. Lueker, Editor, Lutheran Encyclopedia, CPH, St. Louis, reprint edition of 1984, p. 474) The Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus. He entered into the liturgical worship of the Synagogue not to change it but to fulfill it; not to give the people what they wanted but what they needed. As Matthew earlier reports, "...Jesus began to preach saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (Matt. 4:17) And as the angel of the Lord said of Jesus to Joseph, "you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." (Matt. 1:21)

And do you know what's interesting about this? The New Testament church retained the Liturgical Worship. The emphasis would now be on the Messiah Who has come to fulfill all things that we might have the forgiveness of sin and eternal life, and will come again to gather His people and bring this world to its end! Luke reports in The Book of Acts, after Christ's Ascension:

And they (that is, the believers) devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes... (Acts. 2:42,46a)

Christ's appearance in the Synagogues was not to condemn the purpose of worship, but to preach the Good News. The Word made flesh makes His appearance and speaks of mercy, forgiveness and eternal life to "chiefs of sinners."

II. His Revealing.

Verses 16-19 of our text tell us:

And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. 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 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."

What Jesus read from the scroll was the Word of God from Isaiah 61. Regarding what I just read to you from Isaiah 61, Lutheran professor Dr. Arthur A. Just, Jr., writes:

Jesus' sermon in Nazareth launches His ministry.... What Jesus read from Isaiah 61 He would preach throughout His ministry. And that ministry is continued in our worship today. (Arthur A. Just Jr., "Heaven on Earth", *The Gifts of Christ in the Divine Service*, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2008, p. 86)

I'm calling this part of the sermon "His Revealing" because Jesus revealed Himself in worship and, as Dr. Just notes, "to declare (from the reading of Isaiah 61) that the messianic era of salvation had now begun in him." (Ibid, p. 85) Again, the Old Testament worship prepared God's people for His revealing - His First Coming.

And again, you want to remember that these words from Isaiah 61 pointed to Jesus: "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." These words are based on The Year of Jubilee which God instituted as recorded in Leviticus 25. Regarding this, Dr. Just goes on to write:

The fiftieth Jubilee year liberated slaves, forgave debts, returned people to their homes...(Leviticus 25). It anticipated the Messiah's eternal salvation. Jesus announced in Galilee by citing Isaiah 61 that the Year of Jubilee is now present in Him and His ministry. (And please carefully hear the following:) This message of release, foreshadowed in Isaiah and the prophets and fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus, unites the Old and New Testaments.... Even now, (for us) the Scripture is fulfilled in our ears, as His Word becomes alive in us. With the word today, Jesus announces the inauguration of the end times. That announcement reveals to the hearer how his Baptism initiated (us) into a life of continual release, sustained in the Lord's Supper." (Ibid, pp. 89 and 91)

This is why we say, over and over and over again, worship is not, in the first sense, about what we do for God or to induce some sort of feeling. Worship has been - from the Old Testament church to the establishment of the New Testament church - worship has always been about What God does for us through the Means He has chosen; namely, the written and spoken Word and the visible Word of Baptism and The Lord's Supper. Every part of our worship here is Scripture or clearly based on Scripture; the sermon and the creeds.

III. Us.

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (vv.20-21)

Dear friends, this is the eternal blessing of Word and Sacrament; that which works and sustains faith. In one of his lectures to Lutheran seminary students from the very early 20th century, Dr. Francis Pieper said,

Your hearts must be aflame for just this doctrine, for the doctrine of free grace in Christ. You must subordinate everything to the preaching of this doctrine. You must not become bored with it in the course of time. Nay, when you have been in the ministry twenty, thirty or more years, you must preach this doctrine with the same holy zeal as when you first preached it.” (Francis Pieper, *The Church and Her Treasure*”, The Luther Academy, St. Louis, Missouri, 2007, p.75)

Bothers and sisters, we can only stand with the Apostle Paul and declare, “For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” (Rom. 7:18) In and of ourselves, we can do nothing more than cry out with Paul, “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24) This is where we are. This is reality that confronts us daily.

You see, however, that in Christ Jesus we have entered the eternal Year of Jubilee. The Gospel announces that the wages of our sin were taken upon Jesus in His suffering and death. The Gospel is the Good News that though still sinful, for the sake of Jesus we are forgiven. In our Baptisms we have been buried with Christ, raised to eternal life and clothed with Christ (that is, clothed with His perfect life), as Scriptures teach. And in the Supper we receive the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. Through Word and Sacraments we are constantly lifted up to the fact that we have been released from condemnation and hell! We have entered the eternal Year of Jubilee!

This is the goal of every worship service in this Sanctuary. As John writes and we confess, “In this is the love of God, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sin.” (I John 4:10) And, as we have announced unnumbered times and what we want to stand before us every day of our walk through this world, especially as we find ourselves in constant battle with guilt and sin, are these words of Paul: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 8:1) None! Forever and ever!!

God’s Word and Sacraments reach out, speak, extend God’s love and forgiveness in Christ to each! To us! **Chiefs of sinners!**

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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*Luke 4:16-21: **“His Appearance, the Revealing, and Us”***

I. The Appearance.

II. His Revealing.

III. Us.

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