

A Message With Authority

Luke 4:16-30

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

January 27, 2013 – Third Sunday After The Epiphany



In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. In this morning's text from Luke's Gospel we find our Lord Christ in the Synagogue where He was reading and teaching from the book of the Prophet, Isaiah. In that text the Prophet spoke clearly of a future time in which the Spirit of the Lord would be upon the Savior who was to come. This Savior would speak the Gospel to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, deliver captives from the prison house of sin, restore sight to the blind, set at liberty those who are oppressed and afflicted, and preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And then our Lord Jesus makes a most startling statement. He says: "*Today this Scripture is fulfilled in Your hearing!*"

With gracious words our Savior clearly reveals Himself to be the very Son of God prophesied by Isaiah – He who was to come in the flesh of man to save man. But we also see how the people reacted to these words of Jesus. We see it most poignantly in the negative reaction of those who heard Jesus preach in the Synagogue that day, for His words forced them to come face to face with who their Messiah really was. But the question that remained was whether these words of Jesus would work faith in the hearts of His hometown neighbors – or if they would fall on deaf ears and hardened hearts refusing to either hear or believe.

Some have found the beginning of this text rather confusing in that it appears – at least at first glance – as if the people were responding favorably to Jesus. For we read that after they heard Him speak, they all bore witness to Him, and “‘marveled’ at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.” That certainly sounds like they were pleased with what He'd been saying. But, consider what happened next when they began asking: “Is *this* not Joseph's son?” From His youth, the people of Nazareth had undoubtedly either known or been familiar with both Jesus and His family. There's a great likelihood Jesus had actually been trained there in their town as a carpenter. He probably worked for a time with His adopted father, Joseph, in the carpentry business. He might even have been hired to do carpentry work for some of those who were there in the Synagogue that day to hear Him speak!

But, there's no record Jesus had ever received any rabbinic schooling beyond the normal Jewish upbringing and synagogue instruction – instruction that would have been expected of any Jewish boy of Jesus' day. So, while the crowd's question might possibly be un-

derstood in a favorable light – that is: “Isn't it wonderful Joseph's Son can teach like this?” – I think you'd be on much firmer footing, considering the context, if you understood these words in the negative. It's much more likely the people were wondering out loud: “Who does *He* think *He is* asserting *this* kind of authority? How can the unschooled Son of an everyday carpenter be a rabbi, much less try to pass Himself off as Messiah?”

The problem was that Jesus hadn't conformed Himself to their expectations of what Messiah ought to look like. Still, it isn't too hard to see how they could have been confused and perplexed. After all, they had known Him all their lives as Joseph's Son. How could they possibly have missed out on the truth that He was also the Messiah? And what about the fact that all the reports circulating about Him appeared to be true? His words *were* amazingly gracious – not only in their content, but also in the way they were spoken. How could they reconcile this apparent contradiction between what they expected to find that day in the Synagogue with what they actually saw? They didn't know what to make of the situation, so, in their confusion, perplexity soon grew into an outbreak of anger and displeasure directed squarely at Jesus.

It's a well-known fact that familiarity breeds contempt. It's almost always more difficult to win over one's family and friends with new ideas than it is to convince someone you know only casually. But, at the same time – since you already know Jesus as Messiah and the only Savior of sinners – don't you sometimes wonder how anyone could reject such wonderful news concerning their life and salvation? Aren't you more than just a little flummoxed when you speak to someone about the infinite love God has for us sinners in Christ – and they simply reject your words? Well, the people of our Lord's day were no different.

In the synagogue that morning – as everyone was perplexed and confused – Jesus, being the very Son of God, and having the ability to look into people's hearts and minds – knew full well what they were thinking. Though He spoke with authority and claimed to be Messiah, they all knew where He had come from. He had been raised right there in their midst! And so they thought to themselves: “If only He'd perform some kind of sign or miracle – something like He's done before for others. Maybe then we'd believe His words – *maybe!*”

But Jesus squarely confronted this flaw in their thinking that His word could only be trusted when accompanied by miraculous signs and wonders. Have you ever been guilty of such thoughts? Have you *never* hoped that some sort of sign or miracle might accompany an answer to your praying? Have you *never* requested God to reveal Himself and His will to you through some supernatural means so your faith in Him could be validated? Have you *never* phrased prayers in such a way that you at least implied you were keen to have God open up some doorway in your life that would *clearly* show you the way He wanted you to go – or lead you to make the kind of decision He would have you make? Would you *not* prefer God act the way *you* think He ought to act, rather than the way He has promised to act?

What would Jesus say in response to such thinking? According to the testimony of Holy Scripture I have no doubt He would call you to repentance – for whenever you call upon God to confirm in some supernatural way something God has already promised to give you – or whenever you ask Him for proof that He can be trusted to care for You, even though the Scriptures everywhere already teach this, you’re exhibiting unbelief. That’s why here in this text Jesus squarely confronts this kind of thinking by citing two Old Testament examples of God’s mercy shown to Gentiles – the widow of Zarephath, and Naaman, the Syrian. Jesus points them to the fact that the prophets only performed miraculous signs for the Gentiles because they had no other way of knowing about God and His desire to save them. Is there any doubt God expected these Jews to believe already without needing further sign or validation to prove who Jesus was?

In the days of Elijah and Elisha the Israelites rejected the Word of the Lord in mass. The Jews of Nazareth were right in hearing Christ scold them for acting just like those unbelieving Israelites had done so may long year ago – and for telling them that if *they* persisted in *their* unbelief they too would receive neither promises nor signs. It was a harsh word of judgment, but sadly it appears that this day would only be the first of many which would foreshadow the ultimate rejection of Christ by the Jews – which would lead to His persecution, trial, suffering, crucifixion, and finally death upon the cross in the place of sinners.

The Good News for you today is that the stubborn unbelief of this one portion of humanity has not caused God to cancel His Gospel promises for those who still look to Him in faith. Like the Jews, you have no need of miraculous signs and wonders to confirm your faith

in Jesus as Savior – for you know, and as God’s Word also testifies, faith believes God even without signs and wonders. And you should also know that a desire to have one’s life filled with miracles is really nothing more than a sure sign of weakness and doubt.

Yet, even in your weakness and doubting, God still continues coming to you – both with His promises, and the power to believe them. Though there may be many occasions when you probably would prefer God to be more like a “Genie in a bottle” standing ready to grant you your every whim and wish – always subject to your beck and call – the truth of the matter, and you know this well, is that God has already given you the greatest gift and sign you could ever need or desire – the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. Still, because of your sin and weakness there will be times when you fall back into doubt and wonder whether all God has said can actually be true. There will be times when you want the One who saved you from your sin to also keep every trial and tribulation far from your house. There will still be moments when you’ll want at least one miraculous answer to prayer so that your faith might be confirmed and uplifted.

My dear brothers and sisters, when you begin to have such doubts, consider anew the great gifts God has already given You in Word, water, bread and wine – gifts which are brought to you through the ministry of Christ’s Bride, the Church. These gifts are sure and solid – sealed and secured in the cross, death and resurrection of our Savior – the very One who even now speaks to you. Because these gifts have already been earned, sealed, bought and paid for by Jesus through His suffering, death and resurrection, you can trust them – come what may. Heaven and earth may pass away, but God’s Word will never pass away. His Word is a message with authority, secured on Calvary’s cross through the shedding of our Savior’s holy, precious blood. It’s a message with the authority and power to work faith in the hearts of those who hear it – and hear it today, you have. Dear children of God, you no longer need signs and wonders, for your faith rests securely on the authoritative Word of God’s Son – a Word which bespeaks you righteous and forgiven – a Word which makes you eternally a child of God by grace through faith in Jesus, who came to die that you might live. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.