

January 24, 2016
Sermon for 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Luke 4:16–30

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Luke 4:16–30 (ESV)

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ “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, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” ²⁰ 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. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²² And 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?” ²³ And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.” ²⁴ And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. ²⁵ But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, ²⁶ and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷ And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸ When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹ And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. ³⁰ But passing through their midst, he went away.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

What if Jesus came to Bowie this morning?

What if He came to our church?

What if He stood here in the pulpit and preached a sermon?

Wouldn't that be marvelous? A wonderful opportunity to hear a message straight from God in heaven!

Well, this is precisely what Jesus did many years ago when on the Lord's Day He entered His hometown synagogue in Nazareth. And the whole town turned out to see their famous Son preach a sermon.

Yet, how did the story unfold in the Nazareth synagogue.

It's Jesus' custom to go to church every week. He would maintain this custom throughout his life and travels. On this particular Sabbath, Jesus goes with family, friends, and neighbors to worship in his hometown synagogue.

Notably, Jesus does not seek to worship God in His own way, choosing to be somewhere else, but as God desires—in God's house and on the Lord's Day. We might imagine that, being the Son of God, Jesus would not benefit from attending such a worship service. Yet, this is precisely what He does. He sees hearing the Word as precious!

During the service, Scripture is read and expounded by the leader of the synagogue or by a guest. On this day, Jesus is invited to read and comment. So, standing before the people, he opens the scroll to Isaiah 61. With anticipation at

a fever pitch, he begins to read the great prophet: “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 18–19).

When He finishes, Jesus rolls up the scroll and sits down. Then He drops a bombshell: *“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”* (v 21).

At first, the people speak well of Jesus. In fact, “all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth” (v 22). But as they consider critically what Jesus has actually said, they are offended. The mood changes quickly. Jesus senses this and even anticipates their wrath. Hear the voices in the congregation: “How can this carpenter’s son claim to be the Christ, the Savior of God?” “This impostor came from down the street, not from heaven!” “How dare he claim to be equal to God?” The people are shocked and upset because think that Jesus has blasphemed the holy name of God.

What they fail to consider is that Jesus is, in fact, the Son of God, the fulfillment of all of God’s promises, just as He said.

This will be the same conclusion that Caiaphas and the other religious leaders will use to justify Jesus’ crucifixion. It’s just too much to believe that this ordinary hometown Jewish Man is God’s own Son.

Now, it appears that the people are even resentful that Jesus performed signs in nearby Capernaum but not for them in His own hometown.

Jesus speaks up, *“Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb: ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well. . . . Truly, I say to you,”* he continued, *“no prophet is acceptable in his hometown”* (v 23).

Anticipating that the congregation would demand a sign to testify to His divine claim, Jesus reminds that many Gentiles of bygone days were more receptive to God’s Word than they are. *“In truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian”* (vv 25–27).

Outrageous! They get it!

Jesus is saying that just being one of the home folks of God’s people doesn’t get them a thing! And so, they reject their famous Son, even seek to murder Him.

They grab Jesus and drag Him toward the hill on which the town is built, planning to throw Him off. Violence is the sinful response to the inconvenient and unflattering truth Jesus has spoken against them.

Jesus eludes the crowd; they don’t fulfill the evil in their hearts. But others will accomplish it. Their leaders will crucify Jesus, despite their own custom of providing liberty to a captive at Passover.

A captive will go free, while Jesus goes to the executioner. *“They all cried out together, ‘Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas’—a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, but they kept shouting, ‘Crucify, crucify him!’ . . . So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted”* (23:18–21, 24).

Still, in the end, evil will fail to triumph over Christ. Christ will triumph over evil when God raises Him from the dead and receives Him into His heavenly kingdom—in fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy, the Christ of God.

Isn’t it horribly ironic that the very people who could see Jesus in person, those who knew Him best and lived near Him, refused to see Him as their Savior?

How blind they were! And sadly, as far as we know, Jesus left Nazareth that day never to return. Their rejection of Jesus seems to have been irreparable and complete.

What if Jesus came to our town this morning?
What if He came to our church? What if He stood here in the pulpit and preached a sermon? Wouldn’t that be marvelous?

A wonderful opportunity to hear a message straight from God in heaven!
Today, Jesus has come to our town, as is His custom each week, and is present with us in this house of God.

Today, Jesus is present with us in His Word.

Today, in God's house, Jesus "proclaim[s] good news" to all who are poor in spirit. Here each week, "the Spirit of the Lord" is upon us, to release us from the oppression of our guilt and sin.

Here each week, Jesus offers "recovering of sight" for spiritual blindness, so all might see Him clearly as their Savior, whose forgiveness sets them free from fear and death.

Today, you see, this Scripture is fulfilled in *your* hearing.

Yes, we hear from the very Christ Himself during our worship service, today and on every Sunday.

Therefore, since it remains "the year of the Lord's favor," may His Spirit be upon us all.

And may our presence in our Lord's house today strengthen us for the week to come, as again Jesus says to us, "*Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing!*"

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!

Amen.