

Luke 4:16-30

Third Sunday after the Epiphany (Series C)

Lessons for the Day: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:16-30

Eyes, Ears and All My Senses

January 27, 2019

“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. 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 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.’” 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.” 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?” 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.’” And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 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, 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.” When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 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. But passing through their midst, he went away.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

This past week, I shared with the boys and girls in our preschool chapel the words of David in one of his psalms, where he writes: ***“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’”*** (Psalm 122:1, ESV) We talked about the blessings of being in God’s house, and the specialness of this place. Thankfully, for the most part, the children seem to appreciate that.

But do we all feel that way? Do we appreciate the blessing of being here in this place to meet with our God? I’m sure that in more than a few homes, we see attitudes very different than that of David on Sunday. There may be a few who bound out of bed, all excited, with a loud, “Praise the Lord! It’s Sunday, and we get to go to church!” But I’m sure that there are many more homes where mom has to drag the kids out of bed, or she is poking her husband and reminding him it’s time to get up. And then the complaints start: “I’m tired! I need my sleep. Besides, it’s the same boring thing week after week. What difference does it make, anyway? I’m not going this week.” But then, my wife says, “You have to get up and go. You’re the pastor.”

I’m not a morning person. I don’t like to have to get up. But I feel joy in being in God’s house, with His people, to share together in the blessings that God gives. To be honest, my sinful heart is no different than yours. Our sinful hearts, and the devil who works to manipulate our sinful hearts, don’t want us to be in church. God wants us to be here. Our sinful hearts don’t urge us to get to church, but our loving God does. In fact, He even put it in the Ten Commandments: ***Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.*** And, as Luther reminds us with the question, “What does this mean?” ***We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.*** (SC, 3rd Commandment)

The joy we feel is found in the reality of what worship is all about. In our text today, we see Jesus in Nazareth, his home town. We are told: ***And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.*** That idea of Jesus worshipping as was His custom is itself a whole sermon. The only account of the early life of Jesus in Gospels occurs when He is 12 years old, when He went up to the temple in Jerusalem with His family. Like David, Jesus would say, ***“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’”*** (Psalm 122:1, ESV) It was His custom, His habit and His desire to be in His Father’s house. It was never just a duty or an obligation. It was His joy.

While there, Jesus stood up to read, and was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. On that day, in that little synagogue in Nazareth, the Living Word, who came from heaven, is with them to share His Word; to proclaim it and teach it. We are told: ***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.’*** (Cf. Isaiah 61:1-2) As He read ***“the eyes of***

all in the synagogue were fixed on him.” The description suggests that everybody was paying attention to this home-town boy; this visiting rabbi. They didn’t seem to be focussed on next week’s Super Bowl, or on where they were going to go for brunch after worship. They weren’t wondering how long the service was going to endure. They had their eyes fixed on Jesus.

When Jesus sat down, which is what the rabbis did when they began to teach, He preaches the sermon. In that sermon He declares something astounding: **“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”** The promise that God gave you through the prophet Isaiah has come to pass today. The Kingdom is among you. “What Isaiah wrote,” Jesus says, “is about Me. This is happening, here and now. I am here to bring you the year of the Lord’s favour.”

With their eyes fixed on Jesus, the ears of these people now hear the wonderful words the Lord, who has come to be with them. To be honest, the people that day were so much like us. They didn’t truly appreciate the blessing that they were experiencing. And yet, this wasn’t just another Sabbath day in the synagogue. This was the greatest day in that synagogue. With their eyes, their ears and with all their senses, they were blessed with the fulness of God’s presence among them. They saw Him. They heard Him. They touched Him. It doesn’t get any more real than this!

That, my dear friends, is what our worship service is all about. Jesus is the One who comes to us in our worship. As He came to that synagogue in Nazareth, so He comes to be here, in this church today. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who has come to take His place as our brother. He has left the glory of heaven to endure the pain of the cross and the suffering and death that we deserve for our sin, so that we are forgiven and blessed with the life He gives through His resurrection from the dead. And here, in this place, with our eyes, we see the glory of the Lord all around us. Oh, I know that Jesus isn’t standing here like He did in Nazareth. But He does make it very clear: **“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”** (Matthew 18:20, ESV) With our ears we hear the Living Word speak to us through the words He gave to His servants through the power, guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and now proclaimed through His under-shepherds. Jesus told His disciples: **“The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”** (Luke 10:16, ESV) Paul reminds us that **“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”** (Romans 10:17, ESV)

It doesn’t stop there, either. Today, just as it happens every Sunday, the Living Lord comes among us in our worship to bless us with His forgiveness for all our sins. He is here to assure us of His favour. He is here to help us in our needs. With eyes, ears and all our senses, we come to know His presence and His grace. This is why it would be good for us to celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar every Sunday, too. Remember what happens in the Lord’s Supper: the flesh and blood Jesus, who gave His life for you on the cross, comes in a miracle of grace to be among us, to bless us with His favour, to bless us in His love. In the consecrated bread and wine, we see the same Jesus that the people of Nazareth saw. In the Words of blessing He gave us to proclaim, we hear Him speak to us. When we come to the altar, we feel Him in our hands; we taste Him with our mouths. We even smell His presence. With our eyes, ears and all our senses, He calls us to see, to hear and to know the fulness of His love at work for us.

If we think of our worship as boring, or the same old thing all the time, maybe it’s because we haven’t been seeing, hearing and becoming wrapped up in the blessings of our God, given to us each Lord’s Day and every day. Maybe we take Jesus for granted, as did the people of Nazareth. We don’t try to grab Jesus to throw Him off a cliff, but we have to admit that there are times when we despise preaching and His Word. Thankfully, Jesus never grows tired of being present for sinners in His Word, even when He is despised and rejected by them. He loves you, and comes to be with you. He cares about each and every one of us. He knows our hurts, our fears, our uncertainty. He knows the secret sins of our hearts, and the shame we bear. He knows that we are captives of sin, blinded by the darkness of our unbelieving hearts; oppressed by the devil. Thankfully, He is here to proclaim liberty to the captives; to bind up the brokenhearted; to open our eyes and to restore us again.

That, my dear friends, is the real heart of our worship on Sundays. That is what makes this day special and joyful. We get to be with the Jesus who loves us, who died for us, and who lives for us. We get to see Him, hear Him and know Him. David, in one of his psalms, urges us: **“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!”** (Psalm 34:8, ESV) With eyes, ears and all our senses we share in the glory of the Lord. We may come to church out of a sense of duty—and we need that duty, for otherwise the sinful heart would keep us from the only One who can save us. We may come and think it’s always the same old stuff. But it is never the same old stuff. It is always a joyful celebration, when we realize the wonders of God’s grace. It is always a blessing, when we know what God has done. Jesus is here! He is here for you. He is here to bless you. Look around! Listen! With all that you are, and with all that is within you, you will know His presence, and the power of His love, grace and mercy for you. Amen.

