

The Third Sunday after Epiphany

January 24, 2016

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, you sent your Son to proclaim your kingdom and to teach with authority. Anoint us with the power of your Spirit that we, too, may bring good news to the afflicted, bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to the captive; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching, preaching, and healing every disease. Alleluia! (Matthew 4:23)

Sermon Text: Luke 4:14-21

Do you like watching the news? No matter what channel you watch— FoxNews or CNN or 9and10 News or the Nightly News on CBS, ABC, NBC— you hear just about everything happening in the world. Reporters show you violence in Iran and Syria and Europe. Economists try to straighten out the zigzags of the Dow Jones stock market and tell you how the global economy affects America. You hear about water flowing through lead pipes and school “sick outs” and street violence and political tensions. Those tend to be regular topics; are they something you look forward to watching?

Troubling news is not exactly heartwarming, is it? Maybe headlines like those paint a negative picture in life. According to a recent poll taken by the Wall Street Journal, 76% of Americans are not confident that life will be better for their children. That is the worst ever recorded result. That dreary statistic comes regardless of gender, race, age, wealth status, land-region, and political viewpoint (https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/dana-milbank-americans-optimism-is-dying/2014/08/12/f81808d8-224c-11e4-8593-da634b334390_story.html).

Perhaps those results really do not surprise you. You might expect headlines only to mention more tragedy, more anger, more injustice.

Luke 4:14-21

¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ “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,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ 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, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Maybe you not only expect those headlines in the world, but even in your own life. You might expect to hear negative news whenever you pick up the telephone. You may anticipate to see disappointment at every text message or on people's Facebook pages. Maybe you brace yourself to hear the things you cannot do instead of the things you can do. Do you ever wonder if there is much difference between the world's news and the news of your life?

In our gospel reading you hear good news. This is not just good news that made people who lived years ago happy— and so you are happy for them. Rather, this good news remains good news for you today. It rests as your foundation of comfort and joy.
JESUS PROCLAIMS THE LORD'S FAVOR!

Have you ever considered that? That there was a time when people looked forward to Jesus coming, but that was all they could do— look forward and hope that he would come? That there was a time when people could not say: "Jesus died on the cross and rose again"— because he had not died on the cross yet? That there was a time when a payment for sin had yet to be made?

You can just imagine why the shepherds are so excited to see Jesus. Or why the Magi bring valuable treasures to a baby. Jesus is more than just a mere man, he is God who has wrapped himself in flesh! For 30-years Jesus walks and breathes and eats on earth. For 30-years Jesus grows up in the knowledge of his God. For 30-years Jesus keeps silent, but now he reveals a glimpse of his power over all things.

Just last week you saw him say the word and water changes into wine! ([John 2:1-11](#)) That is not the only powerful act he does. Crowds gather in wonder and amazement as the crippled receive full use of their bodies. They gasp when sick people become instantly healthy. They marvel as the blind can see, the deaf can hear, and those silent can speak again. So, when **Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit [...] news about him spread through the whole countryside.** Jesus is someone different, someone the world has never seen before.

The things he does is not the reason people stop and look at him, it is the things he says. Did you catch that from our reading? **[Jesus] taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.** Jesus is a rabbi [a Jewish religious teacher] and a rabbi could lead worship. So, Jesus read an Old Testament lesson. After the congregation sang a psalm together, another lesson was read. Where we have our Gospel reading telling us about Jesus, the rabbi would select a prophecy pointing forward to the coming Savior. Then he would give a sermon about what was just read.

So, on one particular day, **Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "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."** 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.

Do you join those crowds and fasten your eyes on what Jesus has to say? Do you always rejoice because you know that you are not going to hell because Jesus has freed you from that eternal prison? That Jesus restores sight so that you can clearly see the Father's love for you? That Jesus has filled you with eternal riches that the world can never purchase? Or has that news become less than good?

The devil loves tempting us to consider God's good news as old and boring. He loves to paint Sunday morning worship as a chore, rather than a time for spiritual strengthening. He tries to shift our attention off of Jesus and onto our personal wants: more people in church! more young people! more popularity! Even though the devil hates for us to be in worship, he still works on us here; he does all he can to have us find Jesus' forgiveness so often repeated that it becomes mindless repetition instead of heart-warming joy!

It does not sound so dangerous at first, but it can be. To lose sight of the words Jesus preaches, why he preaches them, and how they remain constant in our life, can easily us to forget what Jesus has done for us! It can make us despair because then we feel that life on earth is all there is. That the worldly news which brings heartache is really where any hope for joy ends. It can lead us to lose sight of our main ministry here— that instead of us sharing God's Word with all people, we use our human mind to twist and force God's Word to construct our own worldly results! If we lose sight of this central teaching of forgiveness, we can actually forget it!

What moved people to praise Jesus? Yes, he could perform awesome miracles, but outward signs and actions do not create faith (read [Romans 10:17](#)). What causes so many to marvel at what he has to say? Many stop and listen because Jesus has joyful words in the midst of tragic life-headlines.

I mean, people living in the Roman Empire made money. Kids went to school and did their homework; they laughed and played at home. Spouses came home from work, laying out the day's events, sharing fears and joys, painting their hopes and dreams. They also lived at a time when civil courts accepted bribes; governments could act according to their personal, selfish interests. Spouses argued and fought. Children rebelled, stating their intentions to walk according to a new way of life. People exchanged God's pure teaching for teachings that had very little God left in them. People marvel at Jesus because he is the living image of that never-before-seen promise.

Jesus tells everyone why he is different. **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me..."** In the Old Testament God would send out his prophets to anoint certain people for a specific task. The prophet would take olive oil, find the man, pour some oil on his head, and give him the instructions for the work God intended him to do. God anointed Jesus as a preacher of life-changing news. Jesus is not anointed with oil. Instead, at his baptism the Holy Spirit descends as a dove and rests on Jesus, marking him as someone different, setting him aside for a specific task. That is why Jesus carries a special name: "Christ." "Christ" means "anointed one." "Christ" is the New Testament spelling of an Old Testament word: "Messiah." So, when you see "Messiah" and you see "Christ," they mean the same thing. God gives Jesus the specific work of **PROCLAIMING THE LORD'S FAVOR!**

The “Lord’s favor” points us back to an Old Testament festival. Once every 50 years the nation of Israel held a “Year of Jubilee” celebration ([Leviticus 25:8-55](#)). People working to pay back a debt would be released from their work and debt. Farm fields would rest for the entire year. This special celebration looked forward to a greater day, to the day when Jesus would announce a permanent time of jubilee and celebration.

You see Jesus come to cancel out our debt we owed to God for our sin. He lives a life with a heart centered on God’s pure Word. Never once does he seek to preach for the sake of getting more people or gathering a younger crowd or reaping manmade results. He remains faithful to every single teaching even when it leads him to death on a cross! For all those times we considered Jesus’ forgiveness boring or stale, Jesus is punished. For all those times we feel that life on earth is our end goal, Jesus is punished. For our every failure, Jesus makes full payment. He removes our debt owed to God. He gives us rest from every guilt. He gives you the full rights to heaven. Jesus gives you reason for jubilee, for celebration. **JESUS PROCLAIMS THE LORD’S FAVOR** to you!

This remains good news in life! Regardless of personal wealth, all people are born spiritually bankrupt before God. We have nothing to offer God that would lessen a righteous punishment owed to us. So, Jesus pays off your sin for you. He gives a treasure that can never be taken away, never affected by the stock market, a treasure to which nothing on earth can compare. Just think, all the valuables you own are tremendous blessings. Are you planning on taking those things with you when you die? Unlike your earthly possessions, the guarantee of heaven is forever yours.

Because Jesus has removed your every sin, you have reason to rejoice. Yes, sometimes illnesses might feel like God is punishing you for disobedience. Unfortunate troubles appear like proof that God hates you. Constant family problems may leave you wondering if God cares about you enough to make things better. It is not God getting even with you or punishing you for something you did years ago. He has already forgiven you through Jesus. Your Jesus has removed your spiritual blindness and has shown you God’s gracious mercy. He has removed sin’s slavish chains. He has made you a citizen, an heir, a child of heaven. You are able to approach his throne in confidence.

Sometimes life’s headlines might press into you. Life might be difficult. Heartache and disappointment might be more common than you wish it was. Yet, remember the good news Jesus constantly proclaims to you. Marvel at his words of comfort and forgiveness.

For thousands of years people waited for a Savior, now they see him. They did not see a payment made for their sin, but seeing Jesus, they knew their payment was as good as made.

You have seen those things—and so much more. You know that Jesus has died on the cross and rose again. He has given you the foundation for joy in this life. Even when troubles rear an ugly head at you, you know that your God has prepared eternal riches for you. Even when it feels like nothing in life goes right, you know that all is right between you and God.

Sometimes it might feel like life is bombarded and loaded with terrible news. While this news might remind you of the presence of sin in the world, see sin crushed through Jesus. Rejoice in the forgiveness now yours. Continue remaining in the pure Word of God and see **JESUS PROCLAIMS THE LORD’S FAVOR!**