

**SERMON FOR 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY – January 27, 2019 Our Redeemer**  
**Luke 4:16-30 “Today is THE Day!”**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

It was an ordinary Sabbath in Nazareth. The town was quiet as the people made their way to the synagogue in their customary fashion, to worship God in the tradition of their ancestors. There was nothing special about this Sabbath. Our Lord, too, honored the tradition. As usual, He went to the local synagogue where He had grown in wisdom during his boyhood, to join the neighbors he had known all His life. It was a Sabbath like all Sabbaths. You know, you’ve seen one Sabbath, you’ve seen them all.

Yet, what a day it turned out to be! When the people of Nazareth saw that Jesus was among them, they asked him to read from the Scriptures. It was their way of showing respect. After all, in a very short time this son of Joseph the carpenter, had made quite a name for himself. Reports of Jesus’ exciting teachings and His miraculous deeds had filtered back to Nazareth. Here was a hometown boy who had made good. Now the home folks had a chance to see him in action. An ordinary Sabbath had turned into an extraordinary one indeed!

### **Jesus the Teacher**

Jesus proceeded as He was expected to do. He took the scroll offered him and turned to the place where the Prophet Isaiah speaks of himself and his commissioning by God to be his representative to people in need. Some in the congregation might have thought: “So what’s new?”

- They were accustomed to hearing passages which referred to the coming Messiah.
- They knew He would be like Isaiah, who proclaimed Good News and liberty.
- Yet, their ancestors and they had been listening to sections of Scriptures like this for centuries. So far, there was nothing out of the ordinary in what this famous teacher was doing or saying.

Then came the electrifying announcement. After what must have been the most effective ‘pregnant pause’ in history, Jesus went back to his seat and said, **“Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** Jesus had assumed the customary posture of the teacher, sitting, but what he taught was anything but customary.

- He had said that the centuries of waiting were over.
- No longer were the prophecies of the Messiah only matters of public reading and private anticipation.
- TODAY, on this very ordinary Sabbath, those prophecies have leaped off the scroll and come alive in this Nazarene.

- This day, ordinary to the human eye, is God's extraordinary day, because today is the day God displays Joseph's son as the One through whom He will save his people.

### The People's Enthusiasm Wanes Quickly

The people were impressed. Luke tells us that they "**marveled at the beautiful words He spoke.**" They also wondered where He had gained His knowledge and insight. How can a carpenter's son, they mused, have become so articulate in matters of religion? Luke also tells us what happened next.

- The people weren't satisfied with what their neighbor had said.
- Their hearts didn't leap for joy at the manifestation of God's Messiah.
- They didn't inquire about the specifics of the Good News.

And our Lord, sensing what they were thinking, said: "**You will say to me, 'Do here in your own hometown the same things we were told happened in Capernaum.'**" In other words, Jesus knew they wanted him to do tricks.

- They wanted him to do the same "acts" at home that had received rave notices and made him a superstar on the road.
- They were in no mood humbly to sit in wonder and awe at the Good News of God appearing among them.
- They wanted our Lord to entertain them, to prove that He was more than "Joseph's Son" and worthy of His advance publicity.

And their conclusion was that he was not. He refused to do tricks and instead reminded them of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, who didn't do tricks either. For this they turned against our Lord. The fair-haired boy and favorite son had become *persona non grata* (the person not wanted) in Nazareth. Luke reports that they wanted to throw him off a cliff, but Jesus "**walked through the middle of the crowd and went his way.**" An ordinary Sabbath turned extraordinary had finally turned exceedingly sour.

### An Ordinary Sunday for us

So, here we are. Just another ordinary Sunday. We've made our way, as is our custom, to this church. We come, expecting to hear the same old words about the same old Jesus. Nothing extraordinary. All meet, right and salutary, of course. But expected...ordinary...

But wait. Think about what God is doing here on this third Sunday after the Epiphany. Through His Word, He is displaying His Son as the fulfillment of all the promises he made to Israel...and to us...through his inspired man Isaiah.

Here among us,

- **TODAY, is the One** who is Good News to those who know they have nothing, for in His death and resurrection, he gives them everything in the treasure of his forgiveness.
- **Here among us, TODAY, is the ONE** who is Liberty to those who know they are bound, for in his death and resurrection he frees them from serving their self-made idols to serve the living God in the power of the Spirit.
- **Here among us, TODAY, is the ONE** who is Sight for those who know they cannot see, freedom for those who know they can't shake off guilt alone, for in his death and resurrection, he gives people light to see that they really are God's loved ones, released from guilt and able to see and meet the needs of others.

Wondrously, the year of the Lord's favor, as Isaiah told us about, is **today**, because TODAY, here among us, is Christ the Savior who *is* salvation for all people who are called by His name. Yes, Christ's presence here today turns this ordinary Sunday, any ordinary Sunday, into an extraordinary one indeed. You see, it all depends on your perspective!

- for the average person, snow is ordinary; a part of winter; but for the person who loves to ski or snowmobile – it is special.
- For the average person, rain is ordinary, but when you haven't had it for awhile and the land is drying up – it is anything but ordinary when it comes!
- Christ comes among us today – He makes His presence known in Word and Sacrament. That makes all the difference in the world; it turns this ordinary day into an extraordinary one!

### **The Scandal of the Familiar Jesus**

The thing that caused his neighbors to turn away from Jesus on that long-ago Sabbath in Nazareth was the astounding proposition, put forward by our Lord, that in Him, in this man, this familiar hometown boy, was wrapped up all the hopes of Israel and the promises of God.

- Now, the Good News was not remote but real.
- It was right in front of them. It was Jesus.

The challenge to faith is the same for us on this Sunday. As we hear the familiar words about Jesus being read and sung in this place, God himself is offering himself for the salvation of all in his anointed Son. Liberty, sight, freedom are here for the taking. The challenge is, do you believe it? God chose to come among us in common, familiar things:

- a baby in diapers, set in straw and doted on by a Nazarene carpenter and his wife.
- And he continues to come among us today in common, familiar things: In the water of Holy Baptism;
- setting before us bread and wine in the Sacrament as the food of heaven.

Our temptation, too, is the same as that of the Nazarene neighbors of Jesus. It is to despise God's coming in Christ and to demand that He do what he has not promised to do. The neighbors asked Jesus to do tricks. What do we want him to do?

--perhaps we want him to take away the uncertainty of the Christian life; to manifest himself to the world in such a convincing fashion that it would be folly not to believe; so that the distinction between faith and doubt would be dissolved.

--perhaps we want Jesus to solve all our problems, to get us a job, heal someone we love, bring peace permanently to the earth. If he did what we asked him to do, our faith would rage like an unquenchable fire!

--or perhaps we want an intense spiritual experience, one that would dazzle our senses, overwhelm us, convince us beyond a hint of uncertainty that this familiar Jesus is in fact the One in whom to anchor our hope.

Yes, we hear of the Savior Sunday after ordinary Sunday. And the temptation is to keep him there, in the ordinariness of our worship setting and not invite him into the ordinariness of our weekdays to transform them with His presence. Liberty, sight, freedom are there for us on Monday as well as on Sunday.

- Are we ready to let Christ exercise his saving, healing power in every aspect of our lives?
- When we make decisions about how to spend our time or our dollars, for example, are we ready to let our Lord liberate us from selfishness to use our hours and dollars to the glory of God?
- The people of Nazareth couldn't believe that God could come as close to them as their neighbor Jesus. Are we ready to believe that God is as close as prayer in each of the ordinary difficulties we encounter?

### **God's Promise: Freedom and Power**

We gathered here, as we do each Sunday, in the name of Jesus. Let us join Jesus' neighbors as they gathered in the synagogue, with our eyes fixed on him. But let us also not fall into the trap they fell into.

- It is not for us to demand that Christ come up to our expectations.
- It is not for us to write the script for the Messiah.
- Rather, the challenge to faith this morning is for us joyfully to receive what He has given us, namely, freedom from sin, the promise of heaven, and the energy to live as a child of God.

Here, today, God saves his people. Here, today, God blesses His people. Christ is among us; Jesus, our incarnate neighbor shows himself as Good News. Be glad, then! Rejoice! This is no ordinary day. Today is *the* DAY. This is the Day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Alleluia and Amen.