



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

Our Epiphany readings continue today with the teaching and preaching of Jesus in the synagogue on the sabbath around Galilee and in his hometown of Nazareth. If we were to continue to read in Luke's Gospel, there is some talk of how it was for Jesus to be in the synagogue in his hometown. However, "The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him." So once again, during this Epiphany season, we are seeing more exposure of Jesus' ministry as he becomes known to even more people.

Remember, on Epiphany we had the 3 wise men come to pay homage to the baby King of Kings. Then we heard of Jesus' baptism where God acknowledged that he is his son, with whom he is well pleased. And on to the wedding banquet in Cana where quietly Jesus turns water into wine in front of a few people. Today, Jesus reads the scroll of Isaiah in the Synagogue of his hometown and then claims that the prophets words have come true in Jesus himself. The scope of his ministry is growing as he travels toward the cross, teaching and preaching along the way.

Our story today begins though with us hearing that Jesus' has returned to Galilee and people were now starting to gather wherever He was. And He was teaching in the synagogues and was praised by everyone. I found an interesting article in my reading this week that talked about the temples verses and synagogues. Here is what it said, "Jewish worship takes place in the temple in Jerusalem and in the synagogues of each community. Worship in temples focuses on rites and sacrifices; Worship in synagogues includes prayers, scripture reading, and teaching." For most Jews, temple worship is something that is experienced, at best, once a year and at worst, never. Many Jews expect to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem only one in their lifetime. Local synagogues meet your daily worship needs. So, suffice to say that Synagogues have a significant influence on early Christian worship. Quite interesting to understand the difference. And just knowing Jesus, it is no surprise that he is going around the countryside to synagogues in different town to be where the people are.

And He ends up in Nazareth for a while. This visit probably gives him some time to eat some of mama's cooking, maybe do a bit of carpentry in dad's shop and to pray where He could be alone. The routine He grew up with was certainly simpler than the life he is now living on this trek to the cross.

And then the Sabbath arrives, Jesus probably surprises his hometown mates and reads from the scroll of Isaiah. Note here that he chooses what He will read. Jesus would read in Aramaic, the Jewish language of His time. A portion of the Torah would then be read in Hebrew and an explanation would be provided in Aramaic. Then this reading from the prophet Isaiah with an explanation. There were also other elements of worship included like the reading of the Shema, Deut 6:49, a Benediction, a Psalm, and another Benediction. Most likely each synagogue would have their own order of worship patterned after their needs. There was no lectionary like we follow nor a defined order of worship like we have Gathering, Word, Meal and Sending. That is probably because there is no professional cleric in residence. The person that would do the reading or the teaching was one that had special knowledge about the Scriptures. And on this day that was Jesus. He then would sit down among the people after reading and try to explain to them what he had read in their own language. There was then discussion about the readings. Sounds, remotely like a Bible study to me!

But as the time in the synagogue came to a close, Jesus ends with, believe it or not, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He is the one the prophet Isaiah is talking about. He is the one that has the Spirit of the Lord on him. God has anointed Him to help the people. He is the Messiah that all the prophets talked about. Jesus is the one that God sent. WOW, right there in their own hometown.

SO, what does all this wonderful history do for us? What is the message Jesus is giving to those in the synagogue in Nazareth and for us today. The zinger here for me is the statement Jesus gives. He sets free the scripture passage he has just read. It is like a lion coming out of his cage. And there is no getting him back locked up. Jesus has proclaimed those ancient prophetic words as his own mission statement. God's Spirit is upon Him as we heard in His baptism. The Spirit empowers him to do all the things proclaimed by Isaiah; bring good news to the poor, release the captives, recover the sight to the blind, let the oppressed people go free. This was a proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor. The jubilee year, if you will, when God's justice will be made anew. This folks is his mission statement. From now on He will follow through with these things as He heads to the cross.

Jesus will do these things for people of all nationalities and beliefs. He will continue to do them until He goes to the cross. Many will welcome Him, others will not because it upsets their unfair advantage in life making them uncomfortable and intolerable. And so, as you know, they kill him. However, Jesus rises alive from the dead and continues today to do what he talked about that sabbath morning in Nazareth so long ago.

Today, He works through the body of Christ, His church, and through each one of us. The poor gain hope whether it is their souls or their bodies that are starved. People experience freedom, whether they are in jail unjustly or in an expensive mansion, all alone. Sight is restored whether it is through cataract surgery or opening their eyes to prejudice. The oppressed are set free, whether oppression is a political regime or a drug dependency. Jesus announced clearly that this is the mission of the church. To love your neighbor as yourself.

Here at CTS, we support the Lord's Cupboard and PF Backs 4 Kids with monetary donations as well as groceries and physical help. We help several families each Christmas to see the joy of someone caring about them with gifts and grocery cards. Some of you have sent money to Lutheran World Relief to help with those ravaged by the California fires. Quilts and kits are made to be sent not only around the world, but in the US as well for warmth and help with personal and educational products. Many of you help with bedding, money, or physical labor to build beds for kids in the area, through the Sleep in Heavenly Peace program.

These are only some of the things we do that help fulfill the mission that Jesus has set before us in that synagogue in Nazareth. Many more examples go unrecognized but are no less important in the eyes of God. And today during our annual meeting I hope that you will hear that there are many more opportunities to be the Church of Christ in our community.

The 1 Corinthians, chapter 12 reading this morning gives us an idea of how to live out the mission of the church. Rev Charles Hoffacker said it this way and I agree:

#1 All members of the Church have gifts for ministry

#2 The members of the Church have different gifts for ministry as we are not all the same.

#3 The different gifts come to life in the context of the whole.

Jesus read the old words from Isaiah and claimed them for his own. We can do the same this morning. SO, repeat after me:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.

Because he has anointed me

To bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives.

And recovery of sight to the blind,

To let the oppressed go free,

To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Today folks, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. May God bless you today and always.
AMEN