

Sermon Epiphany 3 2019

January 27, 2019

Luke 4:16-30

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read.

As many of you know, I was sick this week, and perhaps the only thing that I appreciate about being sick is that I get some time to just lay in bed and rest. As I was doing that Wednesday, I ended up watching a documentary on something called the Fyre Festival. Now you may have heard about this in the news when it happened, but if you don't know what I am talking about the Fyre Festival was this huge music festival planned by a company called Fyre. You probably haven't heard of Fyre because Fyre was an upstart business where us common people could use their app and have the ability to book famous people for performances, but the way that they tried to get their name out there was by planning and hosting this Fyre festival. Like I said, this was a music festival, but it would be on a private island in the Bahamas. And everyone was supposed to be going to this festival. That was the way they sold it. What they did was they got all these models who are big "influencers" on social media, and they had them take all of these pictures on the island, pictures basically of them partying it up and having a good time. Then they tagged the Fyre Festival in hopes of getting attention drawn to it so that people would come.

What the documentary told about was how so many people did sign up. They were so intrigued by the message of hedonism and the experience of hobnobbing with all of these famous people, they were willing to shell out thousands of dollars to join in. But the documentary also told about the consequence. You see the man in charge of planning this really didn't know what he was doing. He had great visions of grandeur and knew how to sell an image, but there was really no substance behind it. Sure he created this huge buzz about the company. He created a huge buzz about this festival. He even got the festival to sell out. He was even able to organize the bands to get there. But all of this was something he could only do by peddling promises so grand that he ultimately was unable to keep them. You see, they couldn't create the infrastructure to get in place all that they had promised. By the time the festival came around, they flew these people there, and there was not room for them. There was no way the bands could play. There was not the plumbing and the shelter for all of the people that had spent money on tickets. It all was, like I said, a huge image sell but no substance.

But this is all so indicative of our lives today, isn't it? We buy into the show and the draw of the life where we can all mingle with the rich and the famous and

momentarily ascend beyond what we see as the doldrums of daily life. The ecstasy of this lifestyle seems like it's right at our fingertips: this euphoric experience, escaping the things that keep us down. And on the one hand there's a comment there in itself. After all, what do we see in the manifestation of this, you could say, utopia? Hedonism. We see this exaltation of the party lifestyle with drunkenness and sex as the epitome of pleasure. All the more, if this can be in beautiful location with celebrities, that's as good as it gets right? But if we were just conscious of the wisdom even of the non-Christian philosophers before us we would know that they don't buy that. Even the Epicureans who believed that there was nothing beyond this and we should seek pleasure now, understood that this relentless pursuit of pleasure wasn't satisfied with the bodily passions. So there's that aspect, which is a reflection of our state.

All the more there is the superficial buy in on the whole thing. The whole image without substance. The people who got sucked in got sucked into the pure show. It was flimsy. There was nothing behind it. It was the epitome of thinking that if we put up the right image, we can bring everyone on board, and obviously so many were so hopeful for what they saw as such a paradisiac experience that they didn't care to make sure there was the substance there. And what does that say about us?

As I say that, all the more I think we can say that the events this week in New York bring even a greater revelation to this. I don't know if you saw it, but this week abortion was made legal in New York right up until birth. Now the premise of the law was that it was if a mother's life or health is in danger then the abortion can be performed. But while this can apply to some very, very sad circumstances, we have to understand that there are some who have already spoken of applying this to merely mental strain on the mother about the pregnancy. Likewise, I read that a Caesarean birth would actually be less traumatic for the mother's body, and would give opportunity for the baby live, making such a law really unnecessary.

To make a point with this in mind, a friend of ours who apparently had to have an ultrasound in the hours before delivery posted one of the 3D images from that ultrasound and juxtaposed it with a picture of their child immediately after delivery where you could see this is the same baby. Her point? The personality, the personhood of that blessed child was very obviously not given the moment she exited the birth canal. How much we have lost our mind. Look at the broader view of abortion in the public projection of so many. We'll gladly sacrifice our children for the promise of greater earthly glory. Whether that glory is the career or the freedom that allows us the perpetual spring break. We like the whole show of it.

And that's where we see Jesus in our lesson today. Here Jesus is in Nazareth and He is in the Synagogue on the Sabbath—which Luke tells us was His custom. He went to church, good for us to note. But anyway in church Jesus gets up to preach, obviously something He had the authority to do. And as He does that, they give Him the Scroll, the Bible in the Greek, of Isaiah. And Jesus opens up to this reading we heard from Him which is from Isaiah. Now some say this was the Lectionary reading for the week, others say He turned here to make a point. I am of the understanding that the Synagogues had a lectionary, a set of selected readings and since we do too, I like that interpretation, but in the end, it doesn't matter. Anyway, Jesus gets up and He reads this beautiful passage, and when He's done, of all things, He tells the people there **“this has been fulfilled in you hearing.”** Think about that, they knew that this was messianic, it was about the Messiah, and Jesus tells them that's who He is. But Jesus knows them and so He says, I know what you're going to say, **“ ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.”** In other words, I know you're going to want miracles. And then He tells them the stories of the Widow of Zarephath and Naaman of Syria, both Gentiles who received miraculous gifts in the Old Testament when Jews hadn't gotten them. And the Nazarenes got mad, didn't they? They got mad and took Jesus out to kill Him. They proved what they wanted. What was that? They wanted a show, they wanted the miracles. They didn't care about the other stuff they just wanted the fancy signs.

But yet what was Jesus preaching? Freedom to captives. Which is? Forgiveness of sins. Liberty under our purchase by His blood. Were the miracles great? You bet, but the Devil can pull some great shows himself. If you listened to KFUD when I was on this week Pastor Weedon on there talked about that. He talked about how even the Devil can perform signs, how the magicians in Egypt were able to perform signs. Miracles don't prove it. They're the show, and that show is nothing without the substance.

Now of course, as I say this, it's easy to be critical, isn't it? But what about us? We get sucked in too, don't we? Do you get bored hearing same thing every week? Do you not want to come every week because you figure it's the same thing again anyway, and you know what I'm going to say? That the sermon is just going to be another sermon on the forgiveness of our sins. But what is this? This forgiveness is the substance, it is our liberty!!!

As I say that, I know in ministry I've heard people speak of how Lutherans talk so much about forgiveness and not what to do as Christians. And hopefully, I do some. But did Jesus ever say, “Listen I came to tell you how you should live your life?” To be clear He gave a lot of instruction. And we don't take that as nothing. If you ignore that,

it's a problem. It's still His word – heaven and earth will pass away, but that Word will not pass away. But why does He specifically say He came? **“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for the many.”**

Christians, why do we so quickly want to turn away from looking at Jesus and what He has done for us, and look at a show? Why do we want to look at the show of miracles and think that's the be all end all? Why do we want to look at the example of Jesus and think that's the be all end all? Or even less piously, why do we want to look at the world with her hedonistic pleasures and think that's the be all end all? Because Jesus is talking to us. When He speaks of the bound, that's you in your sin. When He speaks of the poor, that's you in your sin. When He talks about the oppressed—as much as we like to make a stink about freeing the oppressed in our day; and it's good for us to fight for the justice of those oppressed unfairly; as much as we like to turn this into an opportunity to justify ourselves—when He talks about the oppressed that's you in your sin. You are shackled and bound.

But Christians, He has come to proclaim freedom for you. You are free. In our sin we seek the show, the things that look grand on the outside, even when those things look good—the Churches that have brought in thousands and thousands with a fancy show and a great sounding band. The people who receive all the attention for doing really good works. I know this affects you because it affects all of us. As a pastor I daydream about how great it would be to be the one who filled this church to the brim, to have the need to have three times the services here because people would come to hear my preaching. And you hear stories about pastors that do that. Oh that would be great! And as I always say, if I woke up next week and we had twice as many, that would be great. But that's not the be all end all. What is? Who is?

Jesus. The fulfillment of this. The One bringing liberty to you in your captivity to sin, bringing sight to you in your blindness in sin, bringing the good news of His blood shed for you and His resurrection. And the One who brings that to you without the big show of a necessary experience, but instead in the lowly waters of baptism which seem so weak and fallible, the lowly bread and wine at the rail which make for such a poor meal. The word from this average joe who tells you that by his call through that word, Jesus forgives your sin. Christians, this doesn't seem much, but it's the real substance. It's Jesus. Jesus coming to you, and promising you the real joy, the real hedonistic experience, the real paradise: His eternal Kingdom. Hear that promise and don't be distracted by any other show. It will only fall short. Amen.