

**ANOINTED  
TO PROCLAIM FREEDOM and  
TO RELEASE THE OPPRESSED**

Our text for today is the assigned Gospel. From Luke chapter 4 we listen again to verse 16:

*He (that is Jesus) went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

There is an old adage which says, “You Can Never Go Home Again.” Over the course of the past three decades, I have seen the truth of this saying especially when it comes to pastors. It’s not easy, even today, for a pastor to return to his hometown and preach to the members of the congregation in which he was raised. It doesn’t happen often in our circles that a pastor is called back to his hometown congregation, because people who knew you as a child, who saw you grow up, are sometimes too familiar with you or too critical of you for you to be effective as their spiritual leader. It’s like that with hometown crowds.

When the Wright brothers were working on the first airplane, rumors circulated in their hometown of Dayton, Ohio. A local skeptic wrote to the newspaper with this pronouncement. “No man will ever fly. But if a man does somehow fly, it won’t be someone from Ohio. And if a man from Ohio ever does fly, it certainly won’t be someone from Dayton. But if somehow a man from Dayton, Ohio ever does manage to fly, I guarantee it won’t be one of the Wright brothers!” It’s just hard to believe that someone from your hometown, someone you knew as a child, could ever do something great.

Jesus faced the same skepticism in his hometown. We are told that Jesus left his base of operation in the lakeside town of Capernaum and returned to the hill country of Galilee, to his hometown of Nazareth. One year earlier he had left as an ordinary citizen. Now Jesus returned with an entourage, a posse. He was a famous miracle worker, a popular teacher with a band of disciples.

On the Sabbath, Jesus went to the local synagogue in Nazareth *as was his custom*. The synagogue was a place for reading and teaching and worship, not to be confused with the temple. The one temple in Jerusalem was the place for the priests to offer sacrifices to God. The many local synagogues were places of learning and places of worship. As a young boy Jesus had attended years of services, he had listened to hundreds of scripture readings and had participated in the singing of Psalms and the recitation of prayers in this very building.

Although the synagogues of this time had stone benches along the wall, most of the men sat cross-legged on the floor. Jesus and his disciples joined them. The first lesson read that day would have come from the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. When it was time for the second lesson, Jesus stood up to read. The tradition from this era was that a person would sit to listen and sit to teach, but would stand to read. Jesus stood up and ascended the two or three steps up to the bema, a little platform in the front of the room. There the synagogue attendant drew aside a curtain on a large cabinet and handed Jesus the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the passage we call Isaiah 61:1-2. It’s a passage that talks about the Anointed One.

Today when someone is elected to a high office there is an inauguration or a “swearing-in” ceremony, such as we held in Washington D.C. this past week. In Bible times they didn’t do that. Instead they would pour oil over a

person's head. They called this 'anointing.' Anointing with oil would signify entrance into an important office. It would signify the granting of authority to perform the duties of that office. It would signify the conferring of a blessing. In Bible times, anointing was done for kings, for the high priest and for prophets. The Hebrew word for 'anointed one' is Messiah. Throughout the Old Testament there is the promise of a deliverer, a savior referred to as the Messiah, the Anointed One. At the time of Jesus, the nation of Israel was anxiously awaiting the Anointed One.

The passage Jesus read that day in his hometown synagogue spoke about the Messiah, the Anointed One.

<sup>18</sup> *"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,*  
<sup>19</sup> *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Imagine the scene as all eyes were focused on Jesus. He sat down and said, *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* "This very day, I'm telling you I am the Anointed One. All the prophecies about the Messiah are fulfilled in me." Jesus dropped a bomb shell on his hometown congregation. He shook them up by telling them that he is long-promised Messiah. Jesus used this word from Isaiah to set the scope of his ministry. We need to know what it means that Jesus has fulfilled this passage from Isaiah, for his time and for our time. Today we look at the mission of the Messiah, the Anointed One and its importance to you and me.

But first things first, Jesus claimed to be the Anointed One. So when was Jesus anointed and with what was he anointed? Two weeks ago Pastor Kassulke preached a sermon on the Baptism of Jesus and he told us that Jesus was anointed at the time of his baptism. He was anointed, not with oil, but with the Holy Spirit and with power. (Acts 10:38). Jesus was anointed, Isaiah tells us, *"to preach good news to the poor . . . to proclaim freedom for the prisoners . . . to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

At the time of Jesus, the nation of Israel was anxiously awaiting the Anointed One. They were looking for a deliverer in the sense of a political leader, a leader of government, a leader of armies. Jesus came to do something for people that people couldn't do for themselves. He said, "I am sent to preach good news to the poor." Yes, Jesus lived and taught among the poor people of his society, but the real poor people are those who are poor in spirit, who realize their need for help. Sin not only impoverishes us, it also imprisons us. Jesus' message was one of proclaiming freedom, not in the political realm but freedom in the spiritual realm, which is much more important.

Preaching and proclaiming are just what Jesus did for three years. He preached and taught the good news that with God there is peace and with God there is freedom. Jesus' message of freedom is especially important to you and me today. Although we live in a land that is relatively free, politically, Jesus' message is not about political freedom, it is about spiritual freedom. You and I and every other human being are not spiritually free by nature. As we are born into this world, we are born into slavery, into the bondage of sin. We are, by nature, enslaved by sin. (Ephesians 2:1-3, Psalm 51:5).

A Christian missionary to India in the early part of the last century, wrote about a wealthy Hindu man he met boarding a ship in one of the large port cities. The man was loaded down with chains. He could only move with the help of his many servants. It was explained to the missionary that years earlier, this man had vowed to put a new link on the chain for every wrong he did. Now he was helpless, a captive to the enormous weight of the chain. This would be a picture of you and me if it weren't for Jesus. Our daily sins of thought and speech and deed are many. They would weigh us down and make us captive under their enormous weight. We would need release.

Jesus, the Anointed One, is the only one who can offer release and freedom from the captivity of sin. He not only proclaimed freedom for those enslaved by sin, he earned our freedom. He paid for our freedom from sin with his

life. His death on Calvary's cross paid the penalty God demands for your sin. He alone has the power to set souls free. He does just that for all who turn to him in faith and seek his forgiveness.

As a believer in Jesus, you have forgiveness for all of your sins. As a believer in Jesus, you are released from the oppression of sin. As a believer in Jesus you are free from the guilt of sin. As a believer in Jesus you are free from the fear of death. Death no longer means eternal condemnation. Death for a believer is the beginning of eternal life which is "better by far" than anything on this earth. Being free from the fear of sin and death is true freedom. This is the freedom proclaimed to us and won for us by the Anointed One.

*"He has sent me"* Jesus read, *"to proclaim . . . recovery of sight for the blind."* Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would restore sight to the blind. As the Anointed One, Jesus fulfilled that prophecy literally. There are at least four accounts in the Gospels of Jesus giving sight to those who could not see. But since the time of Jesus, countless others with eyes to see were given the eyes of faith to see Jesus as more than the carpenter's son, to see Jesus as God's son, the Anointed One, the Savior of the world. Many others, blinded by false teaching, have been led to see the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Spiritual sight enables you to see Jesus as he reveals (Epiphanizes) himself, True God and your Savior.

And finally, according to Isaiah, the Anointed One will be sent *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor*. The year of the Lord's favor was the Year of Jubilee. Every fifty years in Israel was a year of liberation. Debts were forgiven, encumbered land was returned to the original owner. Slaves were freed. The land itself was given a vacation from being planted and plowed. It was a year of grace. Jesus was the embodiment of the year of grace, the fulfillment of the year of God's favor. This Jubilee year is not a calendar year, but of an "era" of salvation offered to all through the Gospel. It is a "year" that will never end, rather than one year out of fifty. You don't have to wait 50 years for a year of Jubilee to find freedom. You don't even have to wait 50 seconds. Sin abounds. God freely forgives. 2 Corinthians 6:2 *For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you."* I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. Today, this Scripture is fulfilled!

Isaiah wrote down the words of prophecy for the benefit of the people of his time and for the benefit of future generations. Jesus read these words for the benefit of the people of his time and for the benefit of future generations. Jesus' words ought to still ring in your ears today just as loudly, just as clearly, just as powerfully as they did on that day in the synagogue of Nazareth. "TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE IS FULFILLED..."

Today we have God's word and his Spirit fills our hearts. Today, God's message needs to be proclaimed even more than ever before. All too many today live in fear, not knowing that God provides freedom. That's what you have to offer to our community that's different from the world. There are many hurting people in the world today who need what Christ has to offer them. Some people have been used and abused by others, wondering if anyone could love them. You have the privilege of telling them about someone who loves them so much, that he gave his life for them. To those who are fearful of death, you have the promise of eternal life for those who believe in Jesus. For those who are afflicted by sickness or injury, you have the good news to proclaim to them that Jesus Christ is the ultimate physician of body and soul.

That's some good news! And that's what Jesus is talking about in our text when he says that "Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." I hope that today you have come to see that indeed, it has been fulfilled, that Jesus is our ultimate source of freedom and forgiveness and hope, and why it is such great joy to share the message of Jesus with those around you.

The Epiphany of Jesus is frequently accomplished through people just like you. May your Spirit-filled hearts bring forth joy-filled lives for the benefit of those who are still in darkness. Amen.