

Third Sunday after Epiphany – January 24, 2016

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.”

As you walk into the room there is no mistaking who is in charge, the clues are very clear. Up front in the middle of the room is a seat behind a raised desk. The person who sits at that desk wears different clothes from anyone else in the room. A small hammer sits on the desk, ready to be used. As everyone in the room stands, a judge will enter the courtroom to take a seat at the bench with the gavel ready to begin the session. No one is confused as to who is in charge of the room on that day. In the Old Testament the practice of anointing was used to show who was in charge. The pouring of oil on someone’s head marked those who served as prophets or priests or kings. They were given that authority by God to carry out their duties as his servants. For Jesus, he too was anointed, with the Holy Spirit and power at his baptism. And today in our text we see Jesus teaching more about this authority that was given to him. As we look at Luke 4, we see that he was **Anointed with Authority**. This was first, **demonstrated by his ministry** and second, **confirmed by prophecy**.

Last week we heard about Jesus’ first miracle, changing water into wine at the wedding in Cana. But Jesus’ ministry was not just about performing miracles. Verses 14 & 15: “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.” The news was spreading about Jesus, not just because of his miracles, but because of his preaching and teaching in their synagogues.

Now here in our text Jesus was in his hometown of Nazareth, preparing to share a message based on Isaiah 61, which summarized what his ministry was all about. Verses 18 & 19: “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.” His mission was summarized in that first phrase “to preach good news to the poor.” The poor that Jesus was to preach to were not those who were financially poor, but spiritually poor. They had built up a debt of sin that separated them from God and had no way on their own to pay it back and get to heaven. Jesus was there to preach the good news that he was the solution to their poverty. His perfect life and innocent suffering and death would allow them to be rich – he would pay their debt so that their sins would be forgiven and they would be able to go to heaven.

The four other phrases that Jesus read from Isaiah basically describe this same message. Jesus would “proclaim freedom for the prisoners.” Those who were imprisoned for their by the devil would be set free by Jesus. Jesus would proclaim “recovery of sight for the blind.” Those

who were lost in sin were blind to what God wanted in their lives—only faith in Jesus would restore their sight. Jesus would “release the oppressed.” The punishment for sin, eternal death, weighed people down and only Jesus could remove that burden. Finally Jesus would “proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” This was a reference to the Old Testament Year of Jubilee. On the fiftieth year all slaves would be set free, all debts cancelled, and all land returned to its original owner. It was a year of forgiveness and rejoicing. Jesus would bring the ultimate forgiveness and rejoicing to sinners whose debts had been cancelled.

This was a new message for the people of Jesus’ time. Later in Luke chapter 4, when Jesus was teaching in Capernaum, the people there “were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.” This message of freedom and forgiveness was different than what teachers like the Pharisees were proclaiming, a message of work righteousness and earning one’s way to heaven. Jesus’ messages had authority because of what he would accomplish as the Son of God.

It has been nearly two thousand years since Jesus went from synagogue to synagogue preaching his message with authority. Imagine if Jesus was available as a guest preacher to come to our church today. But even without Jesus in our preaching rotation, that does not mean that we are left with a void of leadership and lack of authority. God has given us his representatives that share that same message—our pastors, teachers, parents and others who serve in positions of leadership.

For those of us who serve in these positions of authority, God has entrusted us with an awesome responsibility, to proclaim the good news to the poor. For those of us who are being served, God has also entrusted us with an awesome responsibility, to honor, serve and obey God’s representatives and give them love and respect. No matter which role we find ourselves in, whether it is at home or school or church, our spiritual enemies will still want to imprison us. As leaders we will be blinded by what we want for ourselves rather than serving the needs of others. As followers we also will be blinded by what we want for ourselves rather than listening to what God’s representatives have to say.

No matter which relationship we find ourselves in—parents and children, teachers and students, pastors and members, or leaders and followers—all of us are sinful human beings and should not look past our own failures in these areas. That is why we so desperately need the message that Jesus was proclaiming. We who were poor and oppressed sinners sometimes still fall into that captivity and blindness. The good news is that we have freedom and forgiveness for all of our sins. Then in turn we share that forgiveness with each other. Jesus has given us the responsibility to share this authoritative message as we raise up the next generation, as we proclaim the good news to the world.

After Jesus read the text from Isaiah, “the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him” (v. 20). They were waiting for what Jesus would say next to explain this section of Isaiah. His message was simple in verse 21: “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus was the one Isaiah was writing about, he was the promised Messiah. All the Old Testament prophecies that they had heard read at the synagogue would apply to Jesus. Next week’s gospel lesson will look at the reaction of Jesus’ hometown to the news that man who had grown up among them was also the one the Spirit of the Lord had anointed with authority. To establish his authority Jesus pointed to the prophecy of Scripture which was coming true and would continue to be fulfilled as Jesus made his way to the cross and to the tomb.

Like Peter and John and the believers in Acts 4 who made the connection between Jesus and the prophecy of Psalm 2, today we see clearly how Jesus was the long awaited Messiah, our

Savior, whom the Old Testament writers had written about for centuries. This fulfillment of prophecy is yet another proof of the truth of God's Word and the authority it has for our lives. Yet how often isn't the authority of God's Word ignored today? Just take the list of sixth commandment sins that are finding approval in our world—living together outside of marriage, gay marriage, divorce, pornography. Maybe you struggle with some of those temptations or maybe not. It's easy to wring our hands at the sins we see in society. But when we look inside ourselves we can see that every one of our sins questions the authority of God's Word, because we don't understand it or agree with it or because it tells us that what we are doing is wrong. But once one part is ignored or taken out, then any part is open to interpretation, even that message of freedom and forgiveness. When the God's Word ceases to be the authority in our lives, then all hope is lost.

The Bible is true because it is God's Word, not ours. We desperately need the authority of God's Word because of the message it proclaims. For all the times that we have questioned its authority there is forgiveness. And if we know that God's Word is true then we also know that God will keep all of his promises. There are many prophecies in the Bible that are still left to be fulfilled—many have to do with the end of the world and Judgment Day. With all the things that remain to be fulfilled we have it on good authority that our Lord will continue to unfold his plans and keep his promises for the good of his kingdom of believers.

In a courtroom it is clear that the judge has the authority for those proceedings. It is also clear when it comes to Jesus and his authority. It was demonstrated in his ministry, the message of forgiveness and freedom he came to proclaim. It was confirmed by the prophecy which pointed ahead to what he would do. We have now been entrusted with that authority, through the representatives that God has given us who share the truth of God's Word. Whatever stage we are at in our lives, may we continue to treasure this authority as we wait for all of God's promises to be fulfilled. Amen.