

Luke 4:16-30

¹⁶He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As was his custom, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. ¹⁷The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free those who are oppressed,
¹⁹and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

²⁰He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹He began to tell them, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

²²They all spoke well of him and were impressed by the words of grace that came from his mouth. And they kept saying, "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

²³He told them, "Certainly you will quote this proverb to me, 'Physician, heal yourself!' Do here in your hometown everything we heard you did in Capernaum." ²⁴And he said, "Amen I tell you: No prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵But truly I tell you: There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut for three years and six months, while a great famine came over all the land. ²⁶Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow of Zarephath, in Sidon. ²⁷And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was healed except Naaman the Syrian."

²⁸All those who were in the synagogue were filled with rage when they heard these things. ²⁹They got up and drove him out of the town. They led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰But he passed through the middle of them and went on his way.

Scripture Fulfilled

I.

Many had come that day. Were they just curious, or did they think the visitor would have something interesting to say? They had been aware of him for years already. How could one not be? He had lived there.

Something had changed. So they had heard, anyway. The verses before today's gospel indicate that Jesus was teaching in a number of synagogues around the area of Galilee.

Now he had come home, to Nazareth. During the time he had lived among them, it had been his habit to go to synagogue with the rest of the town. The fact that he would attend the synagogue while in town was not unusual. Word was, however, that during *this* visit *he* was going to be treated as a visiting Rabbi and give the talk.

All eyes were on him as he made his way to the front. The scroll was handed to him. There were no chapters and verses listed in that day, so he would have rolled through the scroll, scanning the words until he came to the part he wanted.

Do you think there was some fidgeting and some whispers while he searched for the place he wanted? He stopped rolling and gathered himself to speak. The hush deepened.

He read the text: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, ¹⁹and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19, EHV). As he stopped reading, all eyes were on him. He handed the scroll back to the attendant and sat down to give the lesson, as was the custom. What would he say about these familiar words? How would his message compare with the Rabbis they had heard before? Could he possibly measure up?

“He began to tell them, “Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21, EHV). Heads began to nod in agreement. “They all spoke well of him and were impressed by the words of grace that came from his mouth” (Luke 4:22, EHV). I suppose it’s natural to agree at first.

Then they started to think about what he had said. The shifting in the pews began.

They *knew* this kid. Sure, by now he was wearing a beard, but he grew up here. He had worked in his father’s shop. Without doubt he was good with his hands; one could hardly be around a master carpenter like Joseph for so long without learning some tips and tricks. He knew wood. But to read from the words of the prophet Isaiah—the very words of *God*—and apply them to *himself* so cavalierly? *That* was going too far.

II.

Let’s step aside for a moment. Have you noticed anything about the themes of the day for these Sundays after Epiphany? They all have the word “uncovered” in them. “Epiphany” means “to appear.” We need God to appear and make himself known to us. The truth about God cannot be *discovered* by us, it needs to be *uncovered* for us.

At Jesus’ baptism we had the theme “Anointing Uncovered.” We learned that Sunday that what our eye sees differs from what God decrees. Last Sunday the theme began “Delight Uncovered.” We learned that Jesus can, and does, deliver more than we can ask, or even imagine. This week is “Reception Uncovered.”

The reception of Jesus by the crowd at the synagogue seemed to start out ok. They were there, after all; they were willing to listen to this home-town boy and see if he might make them proud.

But now the mood of the reception was turning. Jesus could read the congregation. He watched them whispering to one another in the pews. He waited for a few moments. The tension began to build.

What the people were hearing from his lips did not comport with what they knew of this man. Jesus seemed to be implying that he was from God and was the fulfillment of God’s promises. Nothing about his background would suggest that they should believe him. This guy came from down the street, not from heaven!

“He told them, ‘Certainly you will quote this proverb to me, “Physician, heal yourself!” Do here in your hometown everything we heard you did in Capernaum” (Luke 4:23, EHV). Not only had they heard that Jesus had been teaching in synagogues in the surrounding area, they also had heard about the water changed to wine. Cana, after all, was only about 4 miles away. It would seem only natural to expect him to replicate some powerful demonstration to his home crowd if he expected them to see him differently now.

Jesus continued: “Amen I tell you: No prophet is accepted in his hometown” (Luke 4:24, EHV). In fact, Jesus reminded them, *Gentiles* from the past had, at times, been more receptive to God’s Word than they were. In the days of Elijah, God sent him to a widow in a nearby country to survive, rather than having Elijah seek shelter among the people of Israel. Elisha, Elijah’s successor, healed a leper, but not a leper from his own homeland. The implications from these illustrations were that many of the people of Israel had rejected the message from Elijah and Elisha. The further implication was that these people, by doubting Jesus and rejecting him, were rejecting God, too.

Today’s theme of the day read: “Reception Uncovered: rejection is not the exception but the rule.”

Do you ever wonder how a person can hear the message about Jesus and not believe? The *real* question is, how does *anyone* believe? The message of Jesus and about Jesus does not make sense. The message that a carpenter’s son was actually the Son of God sent from heaven to deal with the sin problem every human being has is not logical.

Disbelief is normal. Rejection is the rule.

In the case of those in the synagogue, what they heard from Jesus was so preposterous they were ready to take action. “All those who were in the synagogue were filled with rage when they heard these things. ²⁹They got up and drove him out of the town. They led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰But he passed through the middle of them and went on his way” (Luke 4:28-30, EHV).

What’s the reaction when you are told something you don’t want to hear? Anger. Rage. Even violence. All were in evidence with the synagogue crowd from Nazareth.

What’s *your* first reaction when you hear or read something in God’s Word that hits a little too close to your pet sins? Anger? Rage? Violence? Defensiveness? Perhaps you just walk away. You don’t want to hear it. There’s nothing that says you have to stick around and listen to something that upsets you. You’ll find someplace else that will give you what your itching ears *want* to hear. Rejection is the rule.

III.

For now, Jesus just passed through the crowd. The crowd didn’t get the chance to fulfill their evil desire. Others would accomplish it later. Jesus would be dragged, bleeding, before Pilate. He would be executed on the cross, despite his innocence to every charge leveled against him.

It would happen precisely because he came to fulfill those words of Isaiah the prophet: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, ¹⁹and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19, EHV).

Let’s start at the end of the quote. The “year of the Lord’s favor” means the year of Jubilee. Every piece of land belonged ultimately to God, but was in the care of a particular family. No family really *sold* their land, it was leased, based on the number of years remaining until the Jubilee. If a person was in such financial hardship that he had to sell himself, it was really as an indentured servant; the price paid was based on the rate of a hired hand until the next year of Jubilee. At Jubilee, everyone was to be set free. Every piece of land was to return to its original family.

Jesus identified himself as the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah’s prophecy who would bring that kind of freedom. Sometimes the people were too shortsighted. They thought only of freedom from captivity. They saw the Jubilee Isaiah spoke of as a release from conquering nations.

God intended a far superior year of the Lord’s favor. You have been freed from the curse of sin because of what Jesus has done.

The curses of the Nazareth synagogue would be nothing next to the curses Jesus would face from the crowd which would chant “crucify, crucify” as he stood before Pilate’s court. Those curses would be nothing compared to God’s righteous anger over every sin ever committed by every sinful human being that Jesus would carry to the cross and pay for in full.

Jesus knew it was all coming, and tried to warn those of his hometown. Their rejection would be costly. As far as we know, Jesus left Nazareth that day, never to return. Their rejection of Jesus seems to have been irreparable and complete.

IV.

What if Jesus were to come here this morning? What if he were to stand in the pulpit and preach the sermon? That would be great, wouldn’t it?

Just as it was his custom every week to go to the synagogue, Jesus is with us for worship every week in his Word and Sacraments. The Spirit of the Lord is on us as we poor sinners hear the good news that he has won forgiveness. He has set us free from the oppression of sin and has proclaimed to us the year of Jubilee. God’s favor rests on us because of all Jesus has done.

Come again next week to be strengthened yet again. Jesus wants to tell you each week: “Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”