



“God Made Known in the Body”

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Saturday and Sunday, February 2-3, 2019

All Services

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6;
1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

So, my kids think I am a little crazy, just going to put it out there, It goes back to when they were younger and as I was thinking about my sermon for the up coming Sunday, I would have these moments where I'd say that the Holy Spirit would come upon me, and then I would just preach. No body had to be there to hear me, I just would just kind of go off on all these ideas that were kind of flooding into my head. And I do have to admit it wasn't a nice quiet Lutheran sermon, no, no, I was a holy roller, I mean that's how it just came to me and I would just kind of go off and it could happen any place. I could be in the shower or in my office by myself or letting the dogs out in the middle of the yard and it just kind of happened. I would just get into it. Now, by the time Sunday would roll around I'd pull things back a lot, so I wasn't a holy roller when I was preaching in my nice Lutheran congregation.

But as we look at the readings for today, Jesus isn't holding back. Jesus is telling it like it is. He's speaking the truth in love to his former neighbors in Nazareth. And today's readings illustrate that. But we need to talk about **last** week's gospel reading so that we can put **this** week's reading into context.

Some of you might have noticed that last week's gospel reading was actually the beginning of this weeks reading. The context is Jesus was preaching in his home town. He pulled out the scroll for the Prophet Isaiah and he reads from the 61st chapter.

“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 the sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed, go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

The part that is both last week's ending and this week's beginning, Jesus says, “Today the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (And this is the part where Pastor Liz said last week that then Jesus drops the mic.)

This week we see the reaction of Jesus' former neighbors and the response at first is quite nice. Oh, isn't this Joseph's son, isn't this the carpenter's son. But then Jesus continues with some more illustrations with some more preaching. He talks about Jewish prophets, the greatest prophets by the way, Elijah and his protegee Elisha, who ministered not to fellow Jews but to non-Jewish people. And then they realized the implication of Jesus' teaching and they had an ah ha moment. Actually, they had more like an ah ha hey! moment, and they want to take him and throw him over a cliff.

You see the Jewish social world at the time of Jesus was focused on creating a world, a very sharp social and religious boundaries, boxes / categories for everything. It was a separation between that which considered pure and that which was considered impure, we have that left over today called the Kosher Law.

It was separation between the righteous person and the sinner. People that were considered whole or not whole, male, female, rich, poor, Jew, Gentile. And Jesus from their standpoint is one of them. And this Jewish Rabbi who is from their home town should be concerned about them. After all the Jewish people are God's anointed, blessed by God, they are Abraham's offspring. They would say, we matter, and who does Jesus think he is!?

To think of it, who does Jesus think he is? I wonder by the way whether or not that might not be the advantage of Luke's point in this passage. Who does Jesus think he is?

The people respond with anger. The Bible says they are "filled with rage." Think of it the time that you got the most angry about something, your face turned red. When they come to understand more fully the nature of Jesus' mission, that he is going to be one is going to reach out to the disenfranchised, those who were living on the margin, the women, the poor, the oppressed, the sick, the lepers, the tax collectors, this Jewish rabbi from their home town is not going to be acceptable to them.

After all purity is everything in their mind. There are boundaries and categories for everything. It's the way of their world. And Jesus is deliberately replacing this core value of ethnic, social and religious purity with compassion and love.

Now from Jesus' stand point this is not a new concept. He would see it as bridging that prophetic tradition along the lines of Elijah and Elisha. Even "outsiders" of the faith tradition are objects of divine grace and mercy.

And Jesus is saying he is going to be the one to bring good news to the poor, not just the economic poor, these are outsiders who are going to be able to receive good news. He's going to bring freedom and release to those who are captive as they receive an invitation to wholeness. He's going to allow the blind to see, a metaphor so that they are experiencing salvation and inclusion in God's family. And the oppressed, those who feel pushed down, they won't be under anyone's thumb in God's kingdom.

This long-awaited time of salvation for so many promised by God and proclaimed by the prophets has now been initiated by the ministry of Jesus Christ.

As Jesus says, it is now fulfilled in their hearing. All people are welcome to the table in God's kingdom and all means *all*. Think of all the people that you wouldn't want to have in your church. Yes, them. They are welcome.

The good news of God is for everyone! And Jesus is going to be that change agent to make it happen! And his Church will be the instrument of that change!

Lutheran pastor Paul Lutter put it this way; "God's love, mercy, and healing extends beyond the lines we create for ourselves. To be about the work of God is to erase the lines between us and those we often understand to be unlike us. In God, there is only **us**, not **us and them**."

Economic, political, and social boundaries are inconsequential compared to being in Christ and a part of his Body. And so, it is important for us to discern the body, the Body of God, the Body of Christ.

Jesus comes to tell the truth because he has created a new reality, he's creating a new world. He's creating a community of truth, and of truth telling. But if we're really honest, sometimes we don't want to hear the truth either.

So how is this Jesus community to live out its mission and ministry and purpose?

St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians give us a clue. Now just before the passage that was read, Paul was talking about spiritual gifts for the building up of the body of Christ. . . gifts such as healing, or teaching, or leadership for example. He said there was a diversity of gifts all working for the common mission that Christ Jesus might be proclaimed.

But then Paul says this: "But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way." And then he talked about three things. Faith, hope and love. Now if you think about it these are the foundation of the Christian life, faith, hope and love. But Paul says the greatest of these gifts is love. And then he talks about all the wonderful virtues that love exhibits. . . patience, kindness, humility, respect, joy, strength, generosity, empathy. Love Paul says is faithful, hopeful, eternal.

12th century French monk, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, said; "What is the highest, most exalted act of intelligent life? It is to love. Love seeks no cause, no end, no reward beyond itself. 'I love because I love; I love that I may love'."

In Jesus when you reject a person created in the image of God, a beloved child of God, you reject Jesus himself. In Jesus sin is replaced with grace. Social stigma replaced with love, conflict and hatred replaced by reconciliation in community.

Love is the greatest gift that you and I can offer one another. In Jesus, we are a community of love and compassion. God made know in the Body.

I would like to close this sermon with a prayer that I recently discovered from St. Francis of Assisi. Please pray with me.

Our Father, each day is a little life, each night a little tiny death; help us to live with faith and hope and love. Lift our duty above drudgery; let not our strength fail, or the vision fade, in the heat and burden of the day. O God, make us patient with one another in the fret and jar of life, remembering that each fight a hard fight and walks a lonely way. Forgive us, Lord, if we hurt our fellow souls; teach us a gentler tone, a sweeter charity of words, and a more healing touch. Sustain us, O God, when we must face sorrow; give us courage for the day and hope for tomorrow. Day by day may we lay hold of your hand and look into your face, and whatever befall us, until our work is finished, and the day is done. Amen.

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