

Trinity Sunday, June 12, 2022
First Lutheran Church, Aitkin

Luke 4:16-21 Pastor Doug Larson

Dear Friends in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus didn't sit down and give a class on Holy Baptism or Holy Communion or on the Trinity. It would have been easier. Instead we have had to take His words and other words of God in the Bible and join them together like a jigsaw puzzle. From people doing that through the years we come to what we now believe: One God, in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and understood in the words of the creeds. Maybe when we get to heaven God will say, "Well you did pretty good, but I'm actually a four-part God." Just kidding, maybe.

For my sermon text today, I choose a passage that reveals the Triune God: Luke 4:16-21. You will see in this the names of the three persons of the Trinity: Spirit (Holy), Lord, creator and the word me, which refers to Jesus as God made flesh and blood. In our text, Jesus will read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon because has anointed me to preach good news." The three parts of God. Here is the full nature of God expressed---and focused on us!

These words that Jesus read were originally spoken by the prophet Isaiah, six hundred years earlier to the Jewish exiles, the Jewish slaves in Babylon. In these words, God was saying that God cares and is doing something about their life. Things will get better. Cyrus, King of Persia in 539 B.C. will overtake the Babylon Empire and send the slaves, the captives of many nations back home. Seventy years the Jews had been gone. Seventy years they had been slaves. Good news! Cyrus will say, go back to your lands and rebuild your lives.

Jesus must have thought those words had meaning in His day. Jesus used this text from Isaiah 61 as His inaugural sermon. This passage is essentially Jesus' Inauguration Sermon like when a president is inaugurated. I can still remember being in 7th Grade and listening to John F. Kennedy talk about letting the word go out to all nations that the United States will carry out freedom and that America will build a Peace Corps, to send out volunteers to interact and help other countries.

So Jesus read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to preach good news to the "ptochus" or the poor. But the word means more than poor, it means the oppressed, the afflicted, the down and outers, those who don't get a fair shake. As we discussed this at the Thursday Men's Bible Study, a question came up: what if we aren't those people, the poor or the blind, does Jesus not care about us? A good question and as we talked someone said, that if we aren't in those categories, then good, we are ahead of the game.

But Jesus must have known that there are many like that, in order to use this as His inauguration sermon. As you continue reading in Luke, you will see how Jesus goes out to the poor, the blind, the captives: healing, casting out demons, forgiving sins and sitting with the sinners and outcasts. Jesus will live out God's decision to love you and to be with you! That's good news!

Jesus spoke these words at the beginning of His ministry. They were His focus. Does that mean they are to be the focus of our ministry as His followers?

The story is told of the citizens of a city on a particularly dangerous coastline. When bad storms came and ships floundered on the rocky coast, the citizens would go out in boats to save the sailors and others. One day tho, someone suggested that maybe there could be a bit of shelter as they waited and watched. Yes, let's build a shelter. Then let's make it better, warmer, with some chairs and then better chairs, some food and heat and places for games. When these things happened, they found it harder to go out in the wind and rain and wanted to stay inside. So some suggested, they hire others to go out to save the sailors. What's wrong with this picture?

Jesus spoke to those in need. We need to keep our eyes and ears and hearts open to those around us who are in need of good news. In the last month, from two totally different situations, I heard of people who are the afflicted, oppressed and down and outers. Speaking generally of these situations to another, this person said they have heard stories like that from others. People who are feeling oppressed, afflicted, down and out need to know they are not alone and that God cares about them. In fact, Jesus intends to help them and maybe we are those in need or the ones to help.

We are to make Jesus' ministry our primary goal. Under all that we are there needs to be this foundation and atmosphere of caring, of brining good news to those in need. That isn't easy. When I was serving as a Chaplain at the University of Virginia Hospital in Charlottesville, one Saturday when I was on-call, I stopped into the waiting room of the ICU and surgery. There sat a couple I knew. They had told me earlier that they belonged to a church further south and that when they didn't like what the church was doing, they and others had left, gone down the street six blocks and formed another church. That day, their pastor had come to visit. We got into a discussion and the pastor, learning that I was Lutheran, said that we believed in infant baptism and that wasn't in the Bible. I responded with the story of Paul and Silas in the prison, when an earthquake occurred and freed the prisoners. But they didn't escape and the jailor and his entire family were baptized, babies perhaps and not in a river but with water in the jail.

The pastor didn't have a good reply. A couple days later as I visited the family on the ward with their son, they said they were glad I kind of put the pastor in his place, saying they didn't like him all that much, anyway. What was missing in their understanding of the church and Jesus focus on preaching good news to the "ptochus"?

Our son played football and got a new coach his junior year. He said that he and others on the team didn't especially like the new coach, but they appreciated that he knew what he was doing and they were willing to follow him.

Our mission statement is: As followers of Christ, with God's love we embrace one another, our neighbors and all creation. With God's help, with God's Holy Spirit, we face a world in need and we respond with good news. Almost one hundred quilts were blessed last week to go out to the world. Pastor David Preus, President of the American Lutheran Church through much of the 1970's traveled the world and would share some of his experiences. One day, somewhere in the Middle East, President Preus entered a shop and was introduced as the leader of the American

Lutheran Church. The shopkeeper, went into her backroom and came out with a quilt, saying thank you so much, this quilt came from your church to me. You cared.

St. Cloud is one of the worst cities for sex trafficking in Minnesota. In the last four to five years, a group organized to create a home and refuge for girls and women caught in sex trafficking. Many girls that run away are exploited by sex traffickers and have no way out. This house, called Terebinth brings good news to those in captivity.

We, as followers of Christ need to be sensitive to those around us who have been abused: physically, mentally, emotionally and sexually. We need to listen and be open to what they are saying and offer to help them find some way of coming to terms with what has or continues to happen. Some of these people will never darken the doors of a church, because in some cases, the church has perpetuated or ignored the calls for help. They need to know that Jesus comes to help them.

PTSD is a reality and many suffer from this. I know a person who saw her mother murdered in front of her. We have many service personnel who have seen and been involved in awful things. Many are still captive to these memories and need to know that Jesus and His church care about them.

I had a person in one of my churches, long ago, who never came up for Holy Communion. When I finally realized this, I went to visit him. No, he couldn't take Communion because as a child, he had stolen an apple and he didn't deserve forgiveness in Holy Communion. I couldn't change his mind, but tried to let him know, he was still loved and cared for by Jesus and His church. There are many of these situations. We need to keep applying the good news of Christ's love to these people.

What are we to be about as the Church? Jesus knew there was a hurting world and He wanted to bring good news to it. If we aren't hurting, that's good and may we continue to help and support those who are hurting. If we are the hurting, then may we hear that Jesus has come to bring good news to us, to heal, to free, to restore us to what God wants for us. Amen