

4th Sunday After the Epiphany

January 31, 2016

Gospel: Luke 4:21-32

Epistle: 1 Cor 12:27-13:13

Lesson: Jer 1:4-10

Psalm: Psalm 71:1-6, 15-17

CLB Commentary by Pastor Bill Helland

Luke 4:21-30

If you've ever had a parishioner gush over your preaching, but later turn on you (even to the point of wanting to run you out of the church) then you can relate to this text!

In last week's gospel lesson Jesus had come to his home town of Nazareth, where he entered the synagogue. There he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. After unrolling it he read from Isaiah 61:1-2, a beautiful Messianic passage about the role of the coming Messiah as a proclaimer of good news. The Jewish people longed to see that day!

As Jesus began to speak, they hung on his every word. They were amazed at the *gracious words that came from his lips!* So much so, they spoke well of him and exclaimed how surprised they were that this was Joseph's son!

Now let's pause here, for a moment, to consider those who listen to our preaching. Most (whether they are believers or not) love when gracious words come from our lips.

"Good sermon, pastor! Thanks for those gracious words!"

The temptation for us, who proclaim the Word, is to tell people what they want to hear, for then they are happier with us. We get more compliments on our preaching. They won't run us out of town. In fact, they might even give us a raise! But we are not called to proclaim what people want to hear. We are called to proclaim what God wants them to hear and yes, that does include words of grace. However, the good news has to be balanced with the bad news of our sin and unbelief. And that's where Jesus got himself into trouble with the crowd that day.

So as we continue with the text, we see not only that he pointed out that this passage from Isaiah was being fulfilled at that moment, but also (and here comes the law) that they would not believe that he

was the fulfillment of this prophesy. He cited two Old Testament examples of when their ancestors were so hard-hearted God was only able to reach one or two people. The crowd in the synagogue that day was no different. The law laid their hearts bare and revealed their unbelief, but rather than repent and believe, they chose to run Jesus out of town.

One thing in this passage we can point out to people is that we are really no different. We love gracious words, but oh, how we bristle at hearing the law! We don't like having our hearts laid bare and sins revealed! We don't like being convicted of our unbelief! We too, want to run the proclaimer of law out of town!

However, if we can help our listeners see that, without the law, the gospel is not truly gracious words, but merely talk that makes us feel good about ourselves without saving us, then hearing the truth about our sin and unbelief is essential to hearing and receiving God's grace! We might illustrate it this way: to hear that a massive, destructive storm is coming our way and we need to seek shelter immediately, as bad as that news sounds, is really good news, for if we hadn't been warned and therefore not had the opportunity to find shelter, we might have been killed! The really good news is that we found shelter and it kept us safe, but had we not heard the bad news to begin with there may not have been any good news at all – only death and destruction.

It is good for us and our listeners to be reminded of our problem with sin and unbelief, for if we are not warned of the danger of continuing in our sin and unbelief there is no good news to be had. "Feel-good" preaching, that amazes people, saves no one. They need to hear that they have been rejecting Jesus – the only one who can save them from their sin and unbelief.

May God grant us courage to speak his law and grace with bold, yet gracious lips.