

## Luke 4:16-30

Jesus is the only preacher who is the embodiment of the words He preaches. When He preached at Nazareth from the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah's words became covered with flesh through Him who preached them. Jesus did not just preach Isaiah's words; He was, and is, those words. This is why He said, after reading the words of the text, "*Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your ears.*" What Isaiah had written 700 years before was now standing there in Nazareth before them.

Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah; the One anointed for the great purpose of proclaiming good news to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives, recovering of sight to the blind, setting free those who are oppressed, and ushering in the year of the Lord's favor.

Jesus identifies Himself as being one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. "*The Spirit of the Lord,*" He says, "*is upon Me.*" This great text in Isaiah begins with the Triune God - *Spirit, Lord, upon Me.* And Jesus says, "*Today in your ears...this Triune God is here within My flesh.*"

And yet, not even one person in church that day, that great day, believed. The Scripture was fulfilled in their ears, but not in their hearts.

This same text is before you today. The one who preaches is far less than the One who preached in Nazareth. The words preached here today are as much for this poor preacher as for you. And my task is singular. I am to put the words into your ears, but not into your hearts. No preacher, not even Jesus, can do that. He fulfilled the words in the ears of those in Nazareth, but the Holy Spirit did not fulfill the words in their hearts. And so let it be our prayer that today, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit, the words that are preached into our ears are fulfilled also within our hearts.

The problem, you see, is not with our ears; it's with our hearts. We have the power to hear. We do not have the power to believe. But we think otherwise. We assign to ourselves that which is the work of God alone. The way we see ourselves is misshapen. We're like the blind man seeing himself in a mirror. We imagine what we look like, and in our opinion we look pretty good.

That was Nazareth. They fumed at Jesus. They were enraged at Him. They attempted to kill Him because their self-opinion was at odds with how God viewed them. Jesus told them two Bible stories: Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, and Elisha and Naaman the Syrian. They knew these stories well. But they rejected what they meant for them. God showed mercy to no widow in Israel in the days of Elijah, but He showed mercy to a widow in the land of Sidon. God did not act in mercy toward any leper in Israel, but He acted mercifully by healing Naaman the Syrian.

But these two were pagans! They were outside of the parameters where God acted on behalf of His people. The widow and Naaman were nothing. Worse, they were despicable creatures; not worth the ground they walked on. How dare they receive mercy! What was God thinking in acting with grace toward these worthless pagans!

But Jesus makes the point with His words, "*No prophet is welcome in his hometown,*" that the manner in which God acted toward the widow and Naaman was not the exception, but the rule. It is the nature of God not to show mercy to those of high standing, but to those who are nothing. Any amount of pride

before God nullifies His mercy. Those who think they are something receive nothing from God. But those who are nothing receive everything. That day in Nazareth, the mercy of God was standing before all the people in the flesh. But they rejected God's mercy, driving Him in anger out of their town.

Let us here in Augusta not be like those in Nazareth. But this means that you and I must become nothing before God. We must walk away from who we think we are. "But I'm a faithful member of the congregation!" "I have served on boards and committees for years!" "I more than tithed of my income!" "I'm an upstanding citizen in the community!" They were all these in Nazareth. And they refused to part company with them. They refused to be an outsider, a worthless sinner, a person who did not deserve mercy, a pagan.

But this is who you and I must become for us to receive mercy. When you come here before the Triune God, leave your achievements at home. Put your pedigree in a box in the closet. Unless you do this, you will not see God's mercy, but His wrath on the Day of Judgment.

I say again... no preacher can fulfill God's words within our hearts. They are in your ears today, but God must fulfill them in your hearts. He did not do this in Nazareth. May He do this here in Augusta. May His Holy Spirit work repentance within our hearts, removing our pride. May He open our eyes to the truth that we are poor, and captive, and blind, and oppressed; that we do not deserve the favor of God. May He show us that you and I do stand outside of God's parameters. That we are like pagans with nothing to boast of before God.

For then the word that is fulfilled in your ears is fulfilled also in your heart. That word is the word of God's mercy toward you. That mercy was born of a woman. That mercy was covered with flesh. That mercy of God was rejected at Nazareth and was nailed to a cross. But that mercy of God was raised from the dead, and He is here in the flesh for you today.

God's mercy is not an idea, a thought floating through our minds. The people of Nazareth did not reject an idea; they rejected a person. God's mercy is here today for you, covered with the flesh of bread and wine. Jesus, in whom abide the Father and the Holy Spirit, comes to you in His Sacrament so that you are given the mercy of God. You who stand outside of God's parameters are brought close to God, to His very heart, through Jesus. You who confessed with me that we are no better than pagans with the words, "*I, a poor, miserable sinner...*" are lifted out of your sins by Jesus.

You and I who do not deserve God's favor are shown the greatest favor of all...God declares you forgiven for Jesus' sake. You who were captives are set free from the curse of your sin, for Jesus bore your curse on the cross. This is the greatest blessing in all the world, and it's yours now, today.

No longer are you a pagan. You are washed clean of your sin in Holy Baptism. You are claimed by God. No longer are you a worthless nothing. Before God you are precious in His eyes, and He gives you everything. He has removed from you all fear of His wrath. In Jesus He gives you peace and hope; the assurance of a place in heaven.

All these have been fulfilled by Jesus. And here today, by His command, these precious truths are being placed into your ears. Now Lord, by the working of Your Holy Spirit, fulfill these words within the hearts of us all. Amen.