

**LUKE 4:21-32**  
**AN EXPOSITION FOR**  
**THE 4TH SUNDAY**  
**AFTER EPIPHANY**

*“Good News That Cancels Out the Bad”*

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Grace, Mercy and Peace from Almighty God,  
the Father, the Son ✠ and the  
Holy Spirit. Amen.

The reading we will look at more closely this morning is the Gospel reading for today in which we are told:

*28 And hearing these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 And they rose up and thrust Him outside the city, and led Him up to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, in order to throw Him down. 30 But passing through the midst of them, He went away. 31 And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. 32 And they were astonished at His doctrine, for His word was with authority.*

This episode in the life of our Lord illustrates well for us the difference between His time and ours. It shows dramatically the way that God’s Son truly came into this world at a time when religious passions could not have been higher nor religious beliefs more dangerous.

How striking it is to us to see that, for this crowd, there is no dispassionate detachment from the impact of religious faith.

Jesus says some provocative things in a synagogue and they are ready to murder Him.

Imagine for a moment being there in the Nazareth synagogue when Jesus had just read from the scroll of Isaiah and then goes on to say, *“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

St. Luke wrote, *“The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him.”*

Of course, you already know what happens next in this Gospel account. The congregation began to give voice to their doubts. They thought they were giving themselves a “reality check”, so they said to themselves, “hang on a minute - isn’t this man just Joe the carpenter’s son?”

Thus the people in Nazareth rejected Jesus. They were as filled with doubt and reservation as we are today when anyone claims to have some special insight or makes unusual claims about God or religion.

Yet Jesus was no ordinary religious claimant. He was the God of Israel in the flesh. He really was the one about whom the prophet Isaiah wrote with the words, *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Yet if His hearers were going to benefit from His gracious mission of good will toward men, they were going to have to take the leap of faith necessary to see the one speaking to them as more

than just the son of the Joe, the carpenter. They would have to see Him as the Messiah – the Christ – something that their familiarity with Him would not allow. So they gave in to their doubts.

They were face to face with God in the flesh, yet they preferred their own petty viewpoint about Jesus. Their vanity was like that of Hamlet who said in his madness “I could be bounded in the nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space.”

Does our familiarity with Jesus Christ do the crazy thing and reduce the impact He should have on us? It has in Britain, I know. What did Jesus mean when he quoted the saying, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his own hometown”?

When we domesticate Jesus and reduce His claim upon our lives, then we become like that synagogue in Nazareth – unable to receive the gifts He wishes to give because faith in Him is so familiar to us that we have a “been there, done that” attitude to Christ and His Kingdom. When we reduce Jesus Christ from being the Son of God to just another religious genius, we not only lose Him, we forfeit His gifts.

In Britain, as in the rest of what was once called “Christendom,” they have such familiarity and contempt for the Faith that they say to themselves, “We’ve had a thousand years of Christianity in our culture – let’s move on to something completely different.”

We are seeing before our eyes today that C. S. Lewis was right that “there is

no neutral ground in the universe – for every square inch is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan.”

Are you and I in America now also going to embrace the “post-Christian” attitude, too? Our culture is, even now, taking Christ to the edge of the cliff to throw Him down. Powerful forces in our society are trying to remove God from every aspect of public life.

As in Nazareth, we will not murder Christ. He will walk right through his enemies unharmed, but do we really want to live in a culture from which Christ has walked away to do His work elsewhere? For that is what Christ seems to have done with much of old Christendom, and the spiritual poverty in many European cultures in the absence of the Kingship of Christ is truly devastating, I can tell you.

That day in Nazareth, they may not have succeeded in murdering Christ, but they did succeed in murdering their own souls – for without Him they had no chance of life.

What is the alternative? Repentance and faith in Christ.

That day in Nazareth, when Jesus had discerned that the synagogue was trying to humble Him and reduce His

authority, Jesus reminded them of how the majority of Israel in the past missed out because of their lack of faith. But they didn't take the hint.

He reminded them of their own sad history and they were not having it.

*But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land. 26 But Elijah was not sent to any of them, except to Zarephath, a city of Sidon, to a woman, a widow. 27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian. 28 And hearing these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 And they rose up and thrust Him outside the city, and led Him up to the brow of the hill in order to throw him down it 30 But passing through the midst of them, He went away. 31 And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. 32 And they were astonished at His doctrine, for His word was with authority.*

The Galilean city of Capernaum had a completely different attitude, and among them Jesus was able to give his gifts and see them received by a grateful and faithful population.

All over the developing world the message of Christ and the kingship of Christ are being embraced on a scale not seen in old Christendom for centuries. In areas where people's material needs are hardly being met, their spiritual lives are thriving while materially

wealthy old Europe is spiritually poor, wretched, blind and dying by comparison

Yet there is no reason why the life-giving and liberating work of Christ cannot be carried on by us who are, as the Bible says, the body of Christ today.

Today's Epistle lesson gives us St. Paul's wonderful picture of the church as the body of Christ. If we are Christ's body today – and we are – then we are the ones who are doing what Christ was doing on His behalf today. We are ambassadors for Christ, (2 Corinthians 5:20) God making his appeal through us. We implore (people) . . . on behalf of Christ, to be reconciled to God. And as we proclaim God's message on behalf of Christ, so on behalf of Christ and as His Body, we are or should be in the business of "binding up the brokenhearted, proclaiming freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind. We are the ones who are called to release the oppressed and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor!" Yes, the words Jesus spoke in today's gospel reading should be fulfilled in your reading today.

Looking at that imagery of the body, we should consider the question of where you and I fit in. Are you a foot, ear, eye or nose? Whether you one of those "presentable" parts that Paul writes about or one of the parts that does not get seen, that does not matter – you and I still have a function and are necessary and used by God for His gracious purposes.

Most people would not care to look at a human liver, but all people need

one. If you are not a heart surgeon, a heart is not exactly a beauty to behold, but don't try to get along without one.

As you know there are men running for president of the United States that are often seen on TV. Everyone's eyes are on them. On the other hand, most people are rarely or never seen on TV, yet who does most of the real work? You guessed it—those volunteers whose names you will never know and whose faces you will never see.

As in any endeavor, there are the tasks that are within our capability and those that are beyond us. Jesus Christ, the Head of the body does not ask you to do the impossible.

Jesus has already done the impossible part. He has already finished what we cannot do. By His sacrificial death on a cruel cross and by His victorious resurrection, He now offers freedom to everyone who is imprisoned by sin and death.

Jesus calls on us now to proclaim His Gospel of freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight to all people who are blinded by their own doubts and reservations. To help with this proclamation all of us are needed because we all play a part in that proclamation.

Our Stewardship Committee at Redeemer is planning to issue forms for you to fill out in which you will be asked to consider what gifts of talent and ability God has given you. They will be mailing these to you and probably putting a form in one of our upcoming church bulletins for you to fill

out. In this way, we are helping put the right people in the right places so that the work of the body can best be done.

Today's Gospel reading does not have a happy ending. I'm sure you are familiar with those jokes in which someone tells someone else, "I've got some good news and some bad news." Usually the bad news more than cancels out the good!

Jesus' message to the people of Nazareth and to us is this "I've got some bad news and some good news. Yet, rejoice! The good news of 'the acceptable year of the Lord' can cancel out the bad, rather than the other way around." Amen.