

Sermon: 3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Text: Luke 4:14-30 (v. 21): "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Theme: What's your reaction to God's Word?

Goal: To accept God's word by faith, not rejecting what we don't agree with.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: This was the first sermon of Jesus in his home town, Nazareth, where He had been brought up. His classmates, His childhood friends, His brothers, the Elders, were all there. Instead of still be seated, worshiping and listening, as Jesus used to do in His home synagogue, He was invited to do the reading and preach! A big challenge for Him.

I can remember very well the first sermon I preached. This sermon had been written some weeks before and had been corrected by my professor. All my colleagues had already preached their first sermons, some of them several times; but I was scared. I was 20 years old, the youngest student in my class. I could have preached at my home town; my father was the pastor and he would have been very happy to listen to my first sermon. But I couldn't imagine facing the old hard-faced guys sitting in the pews in front of me. "No prophet is accepted in his hometown." One of the churches in Porto Alegre had an evening service, with a very low attendance. I didn't know those people and I offered myself to the pastor to preach one Sunday evening. He agreed. But the problem was that he announced at the morning service: "This evening student Walter Winterle will preached..." My uncle, a retired pastor, member of this congregation, came with all his family to the service. When I climbed

up to the pulpit (it was a high pulpit!), and saw my uncle with his family, my knees became like jelly... But, by God's grace, I finish the sermon without collapsing. After the service, my uncle came to talk to me and gave me good advice and encouragement. It was good for my ministry.

If I had been rejected like Jesus was rejected after His first sermon in Nazareth, my career as pastor would have finished that day... But God is gracious!

I – The text

The text Jesus read from Isaiah 61 was a well-known text and was accepted by all the Jewish church as a strong Messianic prophecy. They were all sure that when the Messiah comes, He would be an anointed One, and would perform great miracles.

The ministry of Jesus shows that this prophecy was really accomplished in His life. Therefore He could say with conviction: “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” - He had been anointed with the Holy Spirit when He was baptized; He was performing miracles, giving sight to the blind and helping the needy; He was preaching repentance and good news of forgiveness from the very beginning of His ministry. Many believed in Him and were following Him. This News had reached Jesus' home town, and the expectations were high when He returned back home – what it seems to be the very first time since He had left Nazareth to be baptized by John in the province of Judea in the South. They were eager to see some miracles and to hear what He had to say.

II – The first reaction

The first reaction of the people was a good reaction: “All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his

lips.” – People made comments during the sermon, talking to each other. The word of Jesus was touching their hearts. (The Jews were not that quiet like the Lutherans in the Service...)

Similar good reaction we heard from the Old Testament reading for today: Nehemiah 8. When Ezra “read from the book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read” ... “all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law”. After a while, the reaction of the people was such an emotional one, that they began “weeping as they listened to the words of Law”.

Maybe we don’t weep in the church anymore when we listen to the Law of God; but if the word of God doesn’t touch our heart deep, calling us to repentance, something is wrong with us. We have to revise our attitude, if the Word of God is just going in one ear and out the other, or if it is not welcome in our heart.

To those who wept, repented of their sins, Ezra, the priest, and his helpers comforted the people with God’s forgiveness and joy: “This day is sacred to the Lord our God. Do not mourn or weep... Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

III – The final reaction

But unfortunately this was not the reaction of the audience of Jesus. After the first good reaction, when Jesus began to preach the Law and accuse them for their unbelief, they stood up, drove Jesus out of the synagogue and wanted to kill Him. - But it was not the right time for Jesus’ sacrifice. He just “walked through the crowd and went on his way”.

Three years later He wouldn't excuse Himself, but He submitted to His Father's will in humbleness and died on the cross, rejected by His own people and by His own church. This was the right sacrifice of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Many who had rejected Him previously, even His own brothers, believed in Him after His death and resurrection and confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Lord. There is always a chance to reverse the rejection and to come back to the gracious hands of Jesus' love and mercy.

And why did people become so angry with Jesus' sermon? Because He mentioned two examples of the Old Testament, when foreigners were helped by the Prophets and confessed their faith in the One True God, while the people themselves were rejecting God and going astray. Jesus said: *The story repeats itself... You are not accepting me, but foreigners will accept me.*

This is a hard word for us too. Lutherans tend to think that the Kingdom of God is our private possession, like the Jews at Jesus' time thought. The widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian show us that God's plan is much broader and His Kingdom is for all races, languages, tribes and peoples (Revelation 7:9).

Conclusion: What is your reaction to God's Word? Do you become offended by some of the pastor's sermon? It is a good sign. Search deep in your heart to see if the words the pastor preaches are according to God's will and you are doing wrong... Repent and believe, but don't reject. I am not Jesus and I'm not perfect; maybe I make mistakes in my sermons. Come to talk to me if you have any doubt. But don't reject Jesus. It's for your good when the Word of God touches your heart, calling you to repentance and comforting you with the Gospel of Jesus' love and forgiveness. Amen.

