

“We Proclaim Liberty to the Captives”

Luke 4:16-30

All through this Epiphany Season, we have witnessed Jesus revealing His divine nature and His divine power to the people of this world. Two weeks ago, we celebrated the Baptism of our Lord, where the Holy Spirit descended as a dove, and God the Father spoke from heaven saying, “You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased.” Last week, our Gospel lesson gave witness to Christ’s first miracle of His public ministry: Changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana.

Today, we witness another Epiphany, Jesus reveals Himself as the Messiah, the anointed one, the one promised in the Old Testament. Jesus essentially says, “I am the one that Isaiah wrote about. I am the Lord’s anointed one.” But as always, He lets God’s Word do the talking for Him.

When Peter made His great confession of faith and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone about Him until after He has been raised from the dead.

From the same chapter as our Gospel lesson today, Luke 4, when the man possessed by a demon says, “Have you come to destroy us? I know

who you are – The Holy One of God!” Jesus sternly says, “Be quiet.” When He healed people, He would tell them, “Don’t tell anyone what I have done.” The opinions of the disciples, the people that He healed, and certainly the demons were not the sources of truth by which Jesus wanted the Gospel proclaimed to the people.

When Jesus would teach people about who the Christ is, He would always point them to the Old Testament, to the Word of God. When Jesus wanted to show the people that He was the Christ, the Messiah foretold in the prophet Isaiah; when He wanted to show them that this is who He is, He did what the prophecy said the Christ would do. He “preached the Good News.” He “proclaimed liberty to the captives.” He proclaimed freedom to the prisoners of sin.

These are words which have helped me in my ministry. Those who do not know Christ are not our enemies. They are captives and prisoners who have been deceived. They are slaves to sin who are to be pitied, and our task it to emancipate them.

The reality is that you and I do not have the authority to emancipate them, to get them out of slavery. That is the work of the Holy Spirit as He proceeds forth into this world using His Means of Grace to turn slaves into sons.

The Means of Grace – God’s spoken Word; Baptism – water joined with God’s Word; Holy Communion – the Word made flesh under the form of bread and wine; these are the means by which slaves become free. This is

where Jesus wants our attention to be.

Christ's ministry, preaching the Good News of salvation, proclaiming freedom from sin is the same ministry that the Church has today. There is only one Gospel. However, after Pentecost, the disciples were no longer to remain silent about Jesus being the Christ, the Savior of the world. The Gospel that Peter, James, and John preached is the same Gospel that Martin Luther preached, and is the same message of the Good News of salvation in Christ that we as the Church preach today.

The glory of Christ is seen in the proclamation of the Word as it is lived out in the Church. Christ being born into this world and dying for our sins was not the limit of the Messiah's work. Christ was here to preach Good News to the poor, and proclaim liberty to the captives. In those words, Isaiah is talking about us also.

That day, Jesus said to those people in the synagogue, "Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." The Good News was proclaimed. And the prophecy was fulfilled, not just because it was spoken, but because it was heard. Martin Luther famously said that "Christ could have died 1000 times, and it would be of no avail to us, if we had never heard that Good News."

Preaching, proclaiming God's grace in Word and Sacrament is the life of the church. It is the most important mission of the church. Proclaiming to the prisoners of sin in this world that they are pardoned from their sin, that they are no longer found guilty – it is a most magnificent decree.

Imagine the world as a prison. God is the governor who has the authority to grant a pardon to any prisoner. God, the governor, although none of these criminals deserve to be released from their punishment, granted a pardon to all of them. That is what Christ did on the cross. He died for the sin of the whole world so that we may be declared not guilty.

The amazing thing in this great show of love is that as the warden and the other messengers that the governor chose to spread this Good News throughout the prison go about telling the prisoners what the governor has done, most of them don't believe him and they choose to stay in their prison cell.

Now, as messengers go about telling people that the governor has pardoned them, some of them do believe the message, but even many of them don't help to tell the other prisoners, some of them don't even wake up their cell mates to tell them about the good news.

Christ came into this world to preach Good News to the poor, and to proclaim liberty to the captives. Each one of us was born a hard core criminal sitting on death row. As Jesus read from the book of Isaiah, in Christ, God's Word was fulfilled that day. Through the ongoing work of Christ's Church, God's Word is fulfilled in us. We have been pardoned. We have been set free from sin. And we join in proclaiming "liberty to the captives." Amen.