

SERMON FOR JANUARY 23, 2022

TEXT: LUKE 4: 17-19

THEME: THE LORD'S GOOD PLEASURE

**17** And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, **18** “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

In the name of Jesus:

One of the more notable items in our society today is this thing called debt relief. You hear a lot about it on radio and television ads, companies trying to get you to sign up with them so that you can pay off the debts that you owe. People in tough financial straits hear of the phrase “debt forgiveness.” Debt forgiveness is simple in theory, a lender forgives some or all of the debt you owe on a loan. It is an appealing concept, but it isn't as great as it seems, because there are always strings attached. And to compound the problem, there are always scam artists out there trying to prey on the fears of people who are seeking debt forgiveness.

In our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus begins His ministry by publicly reading a section of Scripture found in the book of Isaiah. After He reads the

passage, He tells the hearers that on that very day of His public reading that the Scripture is being fulfilled right before their very eyes.

Jesus says (and this is the quote from Isaiah the prophet):“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jesus at the moment of His baptism, where the Father proclaimed that Jesus was His beloved Son and the Spirit descended from heaven and sat on Jesus’ shoulder. Jesus then begins His public ministry, and that ministry involves not debt relief, but the forgiveness of sins for all who believe in Jesus. Jesus came to proclaim the Lord’s Good Pleasure for you and me.

When Isaiah wrote this passage against the backdrop of the Year of Jubilee that is mentioned in Leviticus 25. In Leviticus 25, we read of where there was a special celebration when once every fifty years there would be a cultural, economic, environmental, and communal reset. Every 50 years the Hebrew people would enter a Sabbath rest, it would be a rest for the land and the people, and all those who were in slavery were then set free to return to

return to their communities. Properties would be returned to the original owner, debts were forgiven, and slaves were freed. In doing this, liberty would be proclaimed throughout the land.

This would then serve as a picture of what Jesus came to do. Christ came to save sinners, sinners such as you and me, who are born in sin, who are slaves to sin, and who can not free themselves from sin. All of mankind is enslaved to sin, and sin pays off with death. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and the wages of sin is death, temporal death and eternal death and separation from God.

So Jesus came to give freedom and liberty to all those who are captive to sin and enslaved to sin. Jesus came to give permanent and lasting release and relief from sin, freedom and liberty, through His life, His ministry, His suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus now gives new life to all who are in Him.

You have been placed in Jesus. You are in Christ, you are a part of the Body of Christ. And within this Body God has gifted you with certain gifts and abilities to use in the building up of His Body, the Church.

That is how God works, it is how He has always worked. There is not a freedom to do what you want, but rather there is a freedom to be interdependent upon one another so that the whole Body of Christ grows up into the maturity that God desires.

One way to look at this is how interdependent each of us are upon one another in society. None of us are so dependent upon our individual self that we can provide for our every need. We need one another. So, when you need milk to drink, instead of going out back to milk your own cow, you go to the grocery. There you purchase milk that has been placed on the shelf by someone who stocks the shelves. The gallon of milk was delivered by a delivery truck, who received the packaged milk from the milk processing plant, who collected the milk from the farmer who milked the cow. And this same concept of interdependence is true in other aspects of our lives, whether we live in our home, go to the doctor's office, or go to the department store to purchase the clothes we wear. As a society, we all work together, using the variety of gifts that God has given so that God can and does provide for our needs and the needs of others.

The same holds true in His Church. This is what Paul is writing about in the Epistle lesson for today. Paul doesn't talk about the Church as the Body of

Christ in a way where one member or one church is superior to another.

Instead, Paul tells us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit that all churches and every member of the Church as the Body of Christ is an equal. Each of us are valued, found worthy, have our identity, not as a result of who we are, or how much money we have, or how much ability or potential we possess. Your worth, my worth, your identity and my identity is found and rooted in Jesus Christ. In the waters of Baptism God has made you His own. God has given you and me and every member of the Church a saving faith in Jesus Christ. God alone makes us His children and God alone gives us faith as well as gifts and abilities to use in the Church for the sake of the Church. That is why Paul writes: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

God has been good and continues to be good to all, He makes the rain fall on the just and the unjust. But to us, we who believe in Jesus, His grace is an amazing grace. You and I have been purchased and won by the precious blood of Jesus. Our filthy rags of sinfulness have been soaked and cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. And God the Holy Spirit has given to each of us not only faith in Christ, but has also brought us into relationship with one another in this Church. Why? So that we might in gratefulness and thanks to God use our gifts and abilities to work together so that God's will would be done, so

that, in the words of Isaiah, we would proclaim the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living, that all might know of God's love.

My grandson Graeme learned to swim in the deep end of the pool this past summer. Oh, at first he was reluctant. He didn't want to go near the deep end, and when he did, he did so kicking and screaming. But he learned to jump into the deep end into the arms of his loving father, Charles, who was there to catch him and allow him to learn the joys of swimming in the deep end of the pool. Our walk with Jesus and our inability to use the gifts God has given to us is a lot like that. God has gifted us to be members of His Church, He has given to us faith in Jesus, gifts to be used in His service, and yet many go forward kicking and screaming, afraid to get involved or not waiting to get involved in the work of what God has given His Church to do. And yet, when we venture forward in faith, knowing that God loves us, Jesus forgives our mistakes, and the Spirit empowers us in gratefulness to use these gifts, then there is much joy in the Church as we go about the work of sharing the love of Jesus with others.

So what is stopping you from using what God has given to you to help others know of His love? Why not do what Graeme learned to do, and take a step out in faith, and learn to swim in the deep end, for God goes with you, to

bless you as you live out your faith to the glory of God and in Jesus name.

Amen