

“Let the words of my mouth and
the meditation of our heart
be acceptable to you, O Lord,
our rock and our redeemer.” AMEN!

That familiar prayer, often used
to begin many a pastor’s sermon,
comes from the last line of Psalm 19.

A beautiful song telling us
how creation itself
tells the story of God’s glory.

It then moves to proclaim how
the Torah is perfect, soul reviving,
and sweeter than honey
dripping from the comb.

The singer then takes an
abrupt turn to the self.

From creation, to Torah, now the writer
questions their own character
and insolence.

The perfect creation, the reviving Torah,
and then the imperfect mouthpiece,
followed by that final and familiar prayer...

“Let the words of my mouth and
the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you, O Lord,
my rock and my redeemer.”

Now we see why it is so
perfect to begin sermons! :-)

In the name of Christ Jesus, welcome
to the interpretation part of our worship.

That time we affectionately call the sermon.

Here in Luke we get
a short one from Jesus.

In my time as pastor I have found that
short sermons can be crowd pleasing. :-)

No one wants the pastor to preach
the whole Bible in one sermon!

Yet, I’ve also encountered those preachers
who can make 30 minutes feel like only 10.

But, I’m not one of them! :-)

I can imagine Jesus being one of them.

He was surely the kind that could preach
for long periods of time and it only feels
like a few minutes, but we don't have
that today.

He simply read some lines from Isaiah and
then the brief interpretation,

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Most scholars believe Jesus *really* did say more,
for why else would they respond to his sermon
the way they did?

But those words and that response is
for the sermon for next week.

Today we simply stay in
the moment of Jesus' first, and
very brief, sermon.

It was his first public speech in Luke and
the reading he chose to interpret
came from Isaiah.

The Isaiah text shows Jesus'
connection to the words in Mary's song.

The “Magnificat” moment, she gave praise to God and prophesied to the great things God does.

Describing the way God doles out mercy
from generation to generation,
scatters the proud and brings down
the powerful from their thrones,

while filling the hungry with good things.

This God sent the rich away empty.

Jesus was his mother’s son, as much as
he is the Son of God. (Pause)

The question then is, “So what?”

The answer to that childlike question is up to you,
and it is up to me, too.

It is God who awaits our answer to the “So what?”

You see, as we listen to Jesus’ inaugural sermon,
you and I might struggle to find
the good news in it.

Oh, I can do some homiletical gymnastics
that make it fit my life.

While not economically poor,
I can be poor in spirit.

While not captive in slavery or in a prison,
I am captive to sin and cannot free myself.

I can point to how, though I'm not physically blind,
"I once was blind but now I see."

We have all heard the preacher do flips
to show how this is gospel lesson
preached by Jesus is for us.

Heck, I've been that preacher!

But, is the gospel message that
Jesus gave to his original audience and
the one I turn flips over so that it
applies to me, really for me?

Probably not.

Now, I am speaking personally here,
am I being asked to sit back and allow
for the Jesus gospel to be heard
by those who are truly in
those real life situations?

The literal poor, the actual oppressed,

the factually imprisoned, and the
authentically blind...

What would it mean for them to hear
what Jesus proclaimed in this sermon?

And what would it mean for me
to stand aside and not be offended
by that preaching?

It would mean that people like me,
who have places of privilege with
money in the bank, a roof over the head,
and advantages that keep
me out of prison...

It would mean that people like me might
need to squirm a little in our seats.

The “Year of the Lord’s favor,” sounds really great
until we get into what it really means.

It is not going to sound like good news
to many of us who live comfortable lives and
don’t want to give up the things
and the privileges, we have.

It is an unsettling message Jesus preached
that day but still one that is delivered

when the Spirit of the Lord comes.

And it is exactly what the Spirit's power looks like.

The Spirit's power is oriented towards
the marginalized, the Spirit is not bound
to a specific location or specific people
but poured out upon all people.

Jesus' first public sermon in Luke might not
be speaking about benefits coming *to* me.

It's really not speaking directly to most of us
middle class people or above, but we can
follow him there to witness
the redistribution of benefits for
those who has lived far too long
without any.

We can let these gospel words fall upon the ones
who desperately need to hear them and
we need not be offended by them,

unless we are selfish or greedy or uncaring...
then we need to be offended so that
we might change. (Pause)

What this all means...

In our newly renovated worship center...
(Thought we'd be in the big building today.)
in this time of celebration that caps off
a large building campaign... is that
Jesus brings "good news to those
who are bowed down."

Period.

Those who are humiliated by
violence and oppression, they get
the release from God.

They would benefit from Jesus' first sermon
and we can be good with that.

And we can even follow Jesus there and
do our part to make it so. (Pause)

It is ironic that the text from Nehemiah
was assigned for us today.

The Israelites had just completed the
long capital campaign and construction of
a wall around Jerusalem.

The building was over,
but the work not done.

So, the priest Ezra summoned everyone
to come together and they read
together the book, from the law of God
to help people make sense of
what would come next.

And the phrase that comes next in verse 8 is,
“they read it with interpretation.”

The Bible, it needs interpretation in order
for it to make sense.

We need help in understanding it!

We come to understand the Bible
by connecting it to real life.

And we have also finished a major building campaign.

Not a wall, but a major worship space
repair and renovation.

Next week is our first Sunday back inside to worship.

St. Stephen is at a critical moment in her life, too.

It is not the first nor will it be our last.

We have taken responsibility to make

the necessary repairs and improvements,
now how will we follow Christ in ways
that bring about radical unity?

We will be mindful to know we fixed the place up
for company to come and for mirroring the
kind of ministry that Jesus preached in Luke.

Some ways will be to stay connected
to the larger church and be embedded in
the community standing for
equality and justice and

By staying open to go where Christ sends us.

Each day we are challenged to discern,
how is the scripture fulfilled in our hearing?

In closing, I want to finally focus on that
second part of verse 20 in our gospel text today.

“The eyes of all in the synagogue
were fixed upon him.”

The eyes of all were fixed on Jesus.

The audience was stunned,
maybe you are too.

They were sizing Jesus up, but
we don't need to.

We know the rest of the story.

Yet, Jesus does wait for our decision.

“The eyes of all were fixed upon Him” sets up
what will happen next week but it also asks
a response from us.

Today, right now, this very moment, what is
being fulfilled in your hearing and
what decision will we make?

The Spirit of the Lord is upon you!

AMEN!