**Crossings Text Study Group – All Are Welcome!**

**Wednesday Mornings at 9:30 A.M.**

**Martin Luther Lutheran Church, Milwaukee**

Dear Friends: The text for Epiphany 3 is Luke 4:14-21, Jesus’ “inaugural address,” so to speak, as he begins his ministry. Indeed, Luke stretches out the inauguration of Jesus’ public ministry in a series of three episodes: His baptism/immersion into the human condition, in which he is confirmed by God as the Son/messiah elect (3:21-22), his temptation in the wilderness, where he puts the powers of evil on notice that he is here to win the world back to God (4:1-13), and here where he announces to the people, beginning in his hometown synagogue, that God has anointed him to fulfill God’s promise of deliverance (4:14-21).

Because the reading gives us only Jesus’ sermon/announcement and stops before we hear the people’s reaction (verses 22-30), we might get the impression that everyone is good with what Jesus is saying. They are not. They can’t believe that the one whom they know only as “Joseph’s son” (4:22) could make such an audacious claim for himself. They want miracles like he did in Capernaum as proof. That’s a sign that they haven’t a clue about the nature of Jesus’s messiahship. They want a “prosperity messiah” not, as we will see, a “crucified messiah.” They can’t imagine that they need a merciful messiah to deal with their sins; they want a powerful messiah who will make them top dog.

Do they misunderstand because Jesus (or the Prophet Isaiah whom he quotes) is unclear? Absolute not. The problem is not with Jesus’ speaking, but their hearing. For they will insist on hearing only what they want to hear, not on what God wants them to hear. But Luke will delve into that later. For now let us look at Jesus’ words and contemplate what he means when he says “Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

As we saw at his baptism, Jesus’ ministry is accompanied by the approval of his Father and the presence of the Holy Spirit (3:21). The totality of deity is invested in the fulfillment of God’s promise to save. To reinforce that Luke describes Jesus’ early movement into the wilderness (4:1), into various Galilean towns and, finally, here, into Nazareth (v. 16) as a movement accompanied by the Holy Spirit or Spirit, for short. The combo of Christ and the Spirit in Luke is important. Jesus is God at work outwardly to save; the Spirit is God at work inwardly to save. The role of the Spirit is to confirm in human hearts that Jesus is Son of God, the savior of the world. In a word, that confirmation or anointing is faith in Christ.

That helps to explain the opening line of Jesus’ address. Although Jesus uses audible words, it is the “Spirit of the Lord” (v. 18) who confirms/anoints him as the one who brings good news to the poor. The role of the Spirit is to convince people in their hearts that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to save. Hearing becomes complete with believing. Jesus has fulfilled his part of the Scripture by showing up and announcing what he will outwardly do. The verbs and the objects of the verbs are important: to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and free the oppressed. In a nutshell, these are all images of God showing mercy to people in Jesus Christ, God “proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor,” the canceling out of all debt, God giving people/sinners what they don’t deserve:  favoritism, mercy. The gospel is not about tit-for-tat justice.  It is about receiving favor, mercy and forgiveness: i.e., getting from God what you could never deserve.

Jesus’ words are crystal clear. The problem is with the people’s hearing. They can’t hear the prospect of God showing mercy or favoritism as good news.  That's because they despise the kind of people who need favoritism (the poor, the captives or imprisoned, the blind, the oppressed--aka sinners) and would never identify with them. We will see this attitude expressed over and over again in the scribes and Pharisees (cf. 5:29-32). A legitimate messiah, they insist, would uphold God’s law, God’s demands, and give them what they have coming.  But Jesus?  He does the opposite.  He overrules the law with favoritism.

The personally decisive battle, then, is the inward battle of the Spirit to win harden hearts for Jesus:  that is, to anoint those who hear him with faith in him. (Recall Luther's *Small Catechism* Third Article Explanation of the Creed.)  That challenge will only be magnified as Jesus outwardly continues to unfold the cost to him for bringing the favor of God to sinners: the cross. He bears the cost of our sin by bearing the cross it deserves. So what we finally have revealed or "epiphanized" in Nazareth Community Synagogue on that day is the nature of the battle for God's mercy (favoritism) that Jesus and the Spirit will pursue from here on out.

**Martin Luther Lutheran Church --**  9235 W. Bluemound Rd, Milwaukee, WI 53226

**Wednesdays -- 9:30-11 a.m.**

Crossings has developed a visual model for organizing the message of a particular biblical text based on the simple idea of distinguishing law and gospel, God’s own diagnosis of what ails us and God’s own prescription of what heals us.  The model is useful for everyone, both those who listen to and those who proclaim the text, because it helps to remind us what to focus on and listen for in the process of reading and understanding a biblical text and relating or crossing it into our daily life.

Who: Anyone interested in studying the Bible – clergy and lay, preachers and listeners

What: We will learn the Crossing Method by using it on the texts that everyone will hear on Sunday Morning

Questions? Email me or call me at 262-642-6303

For more Info on Crossings go to [www.crossings.org](http://www.crossings.org)

I look forward to exploring the Scriptures with you together,

Peace,

Steve Kuhl

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