

EPIPHANY THREE

January 24, 2016

Luke 4:14-21

"Not Some Day but TODAY"

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Let me set the stage for you. The congregation in the small synagogue in Nazareth is just settling in for the sermon. Like some of you, they're trying to get comfortable – but not so comfy they fall asleep; that would be embarrassing, right?

Of course, they're hoping the sermon won't be too long. They hate it when the service goes beyond the three hours they're used to. And that's been happening a lot lately. Someone probably needs to speak to the rabbi about it.

The confirmation students are all set to take sermon notes. And they're thinking, *"I hope he states his main theme clearly at the beginning, so I can tune out after that."* Or, *"I wonder how many sermon notes I still have to do."*

There's a guest preacher today: a son of the congregation named Jesus. And he's just read the old, familiar words from the prophet, Isaiah.

For the listeners that day, these words are understood as a promise from God that someday... **someday**, God will send a savior who'll *"preach good news to the poor, and proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed."*

They're truly **beautiful, comforting words**: words that **make any current hardships easier to bear**, and bring a feeling of peace to all who hear them.

Some of the people are thinking,

"Won't it be a great day when these promises are fulfilled? Too bad I probably won't be here to see it. Our people have been waiting an awfully long time."

"Meanwhile," they think, *"let's see how this guest preacher will explain the words."*

"Will he present them as a word of hope for the future? Or will he use these words to nag us about increasing our giving for the poor, or tell us we should visit someone in prison? Or maybe he'll put a whole new twist on this familiar passage"

It's with thoughts like these that the people wait to see what this young preacher will say. You may have noticed that, following the custom back then, Jesus sat down to preach. I'm thinking that would be kind of nice. Anyway, as he sits down, every eye is on him.

And **then he drops a bomb!** Because what he says is **so different** from anything they expected: *"Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

In this one short sentence Jesus declares that God's Word and God's Kingdom have **broken into our world and changed it forever.**

The *"Someday"* that God's people have been anticipating— that day everyone thought was safely off in the far future – that day has arrived. It's now! And nothing will ever be the same. What a disturbing thing to hear!

Christ, who is the **Living Word of God** has taken **"someday"** and pulled it into **today.** God's word can do that sometimes.

If God's Word were a static, dead word, then it would be a whole lot safer to read and hear it. We could **leave it in the past,** and **keep its promises safely locked away** in the far off future.

But **God's word is not static or dead.**

God's word is **a living, dynamic word** and that word has the **power to twist the fabric of time** and **rip away all our safeguards.**

God's word has the power to confront us with the *"today-ness"* of God's promises.

Sadly, for most of us, that hardly ever happens. Because we've gotten good at containing God's word. We've tamed it.

And so, when we hear the Bible it just sounds like the **same old stuff:** words about something that happened **"a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away."**

Of course, if we listen carefully we might be able to **glean some timeless truth** from the dusty pages – some nugget like the Golden Rule. But nothing too radical.

Many Christians don't read or study the Bible much anymore, but even those who do have learned how to **keep the Bible at arm's length.** We hear the words of scripture as **words about God** or **words about some people we don't even know.**

We rarely, if ever, hear them as **living words spoken to us** and **intended just for us.** But **that's what they are, my friends.**

When Jesus Christ is present, and when we're **open to his presence,** then the words of God in the Bible become the dynamic Word of the living God **for us.** And **when Christ is present,** then the ***"someday"*** of all of God's promises becomes **"today!"**

For example, how many times have we heard the story of Jesus healing the paralytic man who was brought by his friends? We hear Jesus' words to him: "*Your sins are forgiven you,*" and we think, "*how nice.*"

They're fine words that were spoken once upon a time to give assurance to a man that his sins were forgiven.

The words made him feel good but they have nothing to do with us. Unless we're open to the Holy Spirit. Because **if we let it happen** – then these words become **Jesus' word to you and me:** "*Your sins are forgiven you.*"

If, whenever we hear or read the Bible, we open ourselves to the presence of Christ, then the words become **God's Living Word to us today.**

Most of us would probably prefer to hear a well-written **sermon about the Word of God.** But the best Biblical preaching is always a **proclamation of the Word of God for now.** It is **speaking God's word again, in the present tense.**

The late professor Gerhard Forde says, "*Preaching is basically a **doing of the text to the hearers.** Preaching is **doing once again in the present, what the word authorizes us to do.**"*

What would it mean if we heard Jesus' words that way – as Jesus speaking **to us, today?**
Listen again:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring **good news to the poor...** to proclaim **release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free...**"*

What if Jesus is speaking to us? "*Today,* he says *this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*"

Today, Sunday, January 24, 2016, Jesus speaks this message **to you and me.**

But are we poor, are we captive? Are we blind and oppressed? Or are these words really intended for someone else?

Well, there are lots of ways of being poor, blind, captive, or oppressed.

We are poor. And what makes our poverty so tragic is that **you and I are poor despite having plenty.**

Indeed, our riches often contribute to our poverty: our poverty of **time and relationships**, our **scarcity of joy and satisfaction** with simple things. But today, Jesus brings **good news to us in our poverty**.

And, we are captive. We are captive to our need to constantly acquire more: more **money**, more **status**, more **stuff**. Sadly, the **life-goal of many of North Americans** is reflected in the **bumper sticker** that reads: ***"The one who dies with the most toys wins."***

We're also captive to our **attempts to find meaning in life by pursuing every path but the one Jesus has shown us**: the path of **self-giving service** to others. And we're captive to our secret feelings of inadequacy – our fears of **never being quite good enough**.

Jesus comes to us this morning and proclaims **release from all the forces that would enslave us**. He releases us **so that we may joyfully serve him**.

And we are blind. We're blind to **all that God does for us each day**. Blind to **what really matters in life**. We're **blind to our neighbor's needs**, and to the ways in which we can respond to those needs.

Today **Jesus comes and heals our spiritual blindness** so we can **see the world as he sees it**.

And, looking at the last part of Jesus' declaration, **we are oppressed**, aren't we? We are oppressed by the **powers of sin and broken-ness** which threaten to destroy us. Jesus proclaims our freedom today. He's freed us from the power of sin.

"Today," Jesus says, ***"these promises are fulfilled. Today I bring you good news, release, recovery of sight, and freedom."***

The salvation Jesus brings is **not just something that happened "once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away."**

And it's not something we'll **only experience "someday"** in some far off future. The salvation Jesus brings us begins **today – here and now**.

By the power of God's living word, **"someday"** and **"once upon a time"** are **collapsed into the present moment**.

JESUS BRINGS GOOD NEWS AND FREEDOM: RIGHT NOW!

And he does this **so we can take that same liberating message out into the world**.

The word God has spoken to us this morning has given us release, recovery of sight, and freedom.

But the Word is not quite done with us. God's word is always a Word for me, but at the same time it's a word **for me to share with the world.**

We are BLESSED SO WE CAN BE A BLESSING TO OTHERS.

As Christians, we rejoice that Jesus has spoken to us.

We rejoice that **the release, the healing, and the freedom** have been **made ours today.**

Because we need his healing grace, **not "someday," but "today."**

And now, having been set free, we rejoice that **God can and does use us to SHARE THAT SAME GOOD NEWS OUT IN THE WORLD.**

We delight in knowing we can **boldly declare to others** through word and action that JESUS IS PRESENT and SALVATION IS HERE: not someday, but **NOW! TODAY!** Amen