

Sermon for Epiphany 3

The Text: Luke 4:14-21

When was the last time you heard good news? Good news rarely features on our radio or television news programmes or on the front page of our newspapers. The greater the disaster, the more space is given to it. Our media believes bad news attracts a bigger audience than does good news.

Into a world of bad news, Jesus brings us the best news we will ever hear. He wants to help us keep the bad news we hear in focus; and speaks to us a message tailor-made to our needs. He helps us to overcome the negative thoughts in our minds so we can concentrate on all the good things God has done for us.

The first word we hear from Jesus is the word "Today". Today Jesus can bless us in wonderful and unexpected ways and meet our deepest needs with His grace and mercy. Through His word and sacraments, Jesus is with us this morning to strengthen and refresh our faith and equip us for the week ahead. St. Luke tells us that "on the Sabbath, as was His custom, Jesus went to the synagogue" (Luke 4:16) in His home town of Nazareth..

What a resounding endorsement of weekly worship in God's House this is for all of us! Few people had a busier Sabbath day than Jesus. Whenever and wherever Jesus could, He helped those in desperate need, even if it meant interrupting the Service to heal someone in their desperate need. Being in God's House as often as we can is more important than we may think it is. Our time here can bring us blessings and benefits which we may only recognize many years into the future. Nowhere else on earth can we become better equipped for life in this world and for life in the world to come than in the Divine Service each Sunday. Jesus treasured worshipping and praising with fellow worshippers.

Jesus' first sermon in His home town was eagerly anticipated. It turned out to be a time of high drama. Everyone's eyes were focussed on Jesus

as He stood up to read the passage set aside for that day from the Sacred Scriptures. The book of Isaiah, a book filled with prophecies about Christ's coming, was handed to Him. The passage Jesus read tells us about all the good news of what He wants to do for us. First of all it tells us that the Holy Spirit is actively involved in what Jesus does for us. When the Holy Spirit rests on us, God is present in our lives. The Holy Spirit was already active in Christ's conception, baptism and temptation.

Our Lord's listeners hear the best news they've ever heard. He shows them, and us today, how God's Word speaks into the present situation with a message of joy, hope and peace. Above all, Jesus has come "with good news for the poor". "The poor" are those of us who are aware of our spiritual poverty and needs which only our Lord can meet. Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount with this amazing blessing: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 5:3)

The poor are those who, suffering distress, pain or grief, plead for God to help them. Our own disappointments are God's appointments with us. He is genuinely interested in everything about us. He is our "...present help in trouble." (Psalm 46:1) He has shared life's negative experiences with us and seeks to apply His healing touch to where we hurt the most. Jesus' sympathetic ear is of such great benefit to us and His compassionate presence uplifts and strengthens us in our difficult days.

In the time of Jesus' incarnation, the word "gospel" was an electrifying term announcing victory. Jesus brings us the good news of His victory over our worst enemies: sin, death and the Devil. His gospel of grace and favour wants to bring release from those addictions and enslaving habits which make life miserable for us. He longs to bring us liberation from all of our sinful habits and selfish desires, and cure the wounds our sins and the sins of others have inflicted on us. Jesus' gift of forgiveness can free us from the guilt of the past and make life seem brand new for us. Jesus' forgiveness means we can live as if today is the first day of our life.

Our Lord Jesus has come to bring "recovery of sight to the blind". By this He also means giving us a faith which is "super-sighted, a faith that sees God at work in our daily life both for our good and for the good of those near and dear to us. Faith sees what God is doing now. Jesus says, "Did I

not tell you that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40)?" When we let Jesus heal what's broken in our lives, He gives us His unbroken peace, a peace which nothing can destroy.

We long to be in favour with others. We want them to like us despite our weaknesses and faults. We sometimes do things to earn their favour. But we don't have to do anything to earn God's favour. Jesus came to announce "a year of the Lord's favour". This year is also a year of His favour. Jesus wants to treat us so much better than our past deserves. He gives us new status and worth before God. Let all the good news about Jesus crowd out all the bad news we'll hear this year. Jesus' gospel is both an undeserved gift and a transforming power which seeks to make us Christlike in all we do or say.

The Gospel is the light which salvation throws ahead to lead us. This means the Gospel isn't a utopian description of some far off future. It is the daybreak of this future in God's forgiveness which sets us free from fear. "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation." (Martin Luther) The Lord's Supper is good news which equips us to handle the week ahead creatively. Our God does more than say, "I love you". He gives Himself to us in Holy Communion as a gift of love. The forgiveness given to us in Holy Communion is God's barrier-breaking, future-opening gift to us.

Our prospects for the future are as bright as God's good promises to us. His presence can make this year a year of unexpected blessings coming our way. Holy Communion gives us a foretaste of the Feast to come in heaven. The weight of the past need no more dampen tomorrow's outlook. As we go into this new year, remember, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8)." Don't let the bad secular predictions about the future make you afraid of it. Embrace your Lord's words to you: "Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) May these words fill us with a triumphant faith! "And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith." (1 John 5:4)." There's nothing tame or timid about genuine Christian faith!

To those of us who delight in listening to the words of Jesus He says:
“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)
What a blessing it is to know of His unconditional care for us.

Jesus Christ, the dearly loved Son of God, makes our Creator so approachable and endearing to us. Because of all that Christ has done for us, God looks at us as recipients of Christ’s victory and smiles on us. God’s will won’t take us where His grace can’t keep us in His loving care. God promises us: “...as your days, so shall your strength be.” (Deuteronomy 33:25)

Our deepest desire for each other over the coming months can be that we “...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” (2 Peter 3:18).

Amen.