

**Debt Free! Luke 4:16-30**  
*The Third Sunday after the Epiphany*  
*January 23/24, 2010*

We get all excited of course when our children speak their first words. We think of course that they are great geniuses when they can come up with “DADA, MAMA, LOVE YOU. Or sometimes as in my family the first prayer I ever learned to say was “Abba, Father, Amen. Daddy, Daddy, it’s true, Amen. But you see, there I was speaking in Aramaic, English, and Greek. How good is that!

In today’s text, Jesus speaks to his home town. Our text for today starts off, “Jesus went to Nazareth, the town where he had grown up; and on the Sabbath he went into the Synagogue, as was his custom...Where he had been brought up”. It was his hometown.

In the verse just before this we are told, “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.”

But on this day unlike others he was invited to read, having become a well known rabbi. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed him. Unrolling it he found the place where it is written from the Prophet Isaiah. “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of prison to those who are bound. To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then he rolled up the scroll, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Again and again in the Gospel of Luke the word “today” shows up in key places. Earlier in chapter two, what is it that the angel announces to the shepherds “Today, a savior has been born.” Later Jesus will say to the repentant Zacchaeus, “Today, has salvation come to this house,” (Luke 19:9) Finally on the cross we hear Jesus words to a criminal hanging on the cross, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

Luke wants us to be sure to hear the good news that in this Jesus Christ, God is fulfilling the promise of a Savior. We need not look for another at a later date. The Savior is here, now, today!

The words Jesus is reading from Isaiah point to what we can expect from the Messiah. Jesus has come to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

And Jews listening knew that Jesus was referring to an event in the OT known as the year of Jubilee, which was to occur every 50 years. What was to happen in that year.

In that 50<sup>th</sup> year any Jew that had become a slave, because of debt was to be set free. Any land or house that had been sold because of debt was to be returned to the owner (except in walled cities) or among the Levites. All debts that anyone had to another person were to be cancelled. People were to be debt free. You can imagine what a great year that would have been. People would have been jubilant. You can imagine how

unpopular it would have been, everything being returned to its original owner, debts cancelled, people set free. I can't even imagine it.

That makes Jesus announcement even more amazing. He declares that what has never happened before is happening today, but on an even more profound level. He does not hesitate, he does not postpone; in order to go to Jerusalem and build a power base from which to implement his program. Today God is bringing this to pass through me.

Hear the good news, not only for today, but good news for your entire lifetime, and the entire life of the universe. Through Jesus God declares that there is justice, mercy, and healing in this world. Today! In Jesus who cancels our debts before God you are being returned to the rightful owner, God. Your debt to God is being cancelled, you are set free from the oppression, blindness of sin, death, and the devil in which all of us can find ourselves oppressed. That's happening, Today!

For the reason God wanted and declared this debt free program, so that people might be set free of slavery was this. "For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."

Grasp that as good news today! Grasp it so that when you confess your sin in public and in private, you can be sure that God removes your debt to him because of Jesus, now, Today! God does not say, "Well let's wait and see." No, God removes your debts and forgives you Today!

Grasp it today, that your entire debt to God, is wiped away, that you are returned to the rightful owner, God the father! You are his servant, his child, his body, and nobody else.

Grasp today, that you have a redeemer-someone who is able to pay the price to do all this, in his life, death and resurrection and that someone is Jesus Christ. This is our year of "jubilee!"

If Jesus had only stopped there, he wouldn't have made anybody mad, he wouldn't have offended anybody, but fortunately for us he continues. He knows their hearts just as he knows ours.

In Haiti of course we know of the heartache following the huge earthquake. We know of course that many countries are sending aid and supplies and rescue teams. We know too that because of the situation, how hard it is to get relief to the people. The gap between sending huge relief efforts, and the help that can be given. It is estimated 200,000 people have already died, and more will die because they can't get help in time.

While speaking in the synagogue in Nazareth the people were astonished by his words and they said, "How right he is," "What a blessing to us over here in Nazareth isn't he the son of Joseph, a man of this town, what a great blessing to us They had been talking about him all over the place.

By why had he given them all that wine in Cana of all places? What about their own thirst there in Nazareth? Why those healings in Capernaum? What about the sick in the street where he lived? Why all those spectacular things among strangers and foreigners, why had he not come home immediately after the baptism they all had heard about. Was

he not Joseph's son, did he not belong to them, was he not of their flesh and blood? He should be ashamed of himself. He should stay with them.

Jesus knew them very well. He knew their thoughts exactly and he said, "No doubt you want to tell me: heal yourself, do the things you did this moment elsewhere, now over here. Stay with us; restrict yourself to your own circle.

No doubt you want to tell me; while you were healing in Capernaum there were sick people over here in your own town, in your own family. What do you think they thought when they heard that you were healing elsewhere, losing your time in far off places? Shame on you! Shame!

They wanted to restrict him to themselves only. That Jesus was for their own little group only; they wanted him to work among themselves only. What about Elijah? Jesus says, "There were very many widows in his day, starving with their children in the land of Israel. But he did not help them, he helped a foreign one in Zarephath. What about Elijah? There were very many lepers in his day, suffering bitterly in the land of Israel, but he did not help them, he helped an alien one, Naaman, the army commander of Syria."

And the people in Jesus' home town got furious and they sprang to their feet. He hit them in their hearts.

They said, "If you don't want us...If you don't want us exclusively...then we don't want you...fall dead, perish disappear!"

If that little circle had won the day, then where would we be in our own little circles and little clans, and little places.

They marched him to the brow of the hill to throw him down the cliff!

But passing through their midst, he went away and continued to proclaim God's Jubilee to all who would listen.

Sharing his justice, his compassion, his forgiveness to the world; and more important, taking away the debt that people owe to God and restoring them to their original owner, as God's servants.

He has invited and declared us to be his body in the world, that all of us are important in declaring the compassion of God and living it out. To announce the year of Jubilee, and by his word free the people to be God's people, not tomorrow, but today. Now that you know your debt to God is gone, what are you going to do! You have been restored to the original owner. Today, it's being lived out in Haiti.