

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Jesus went to church today. He went there to read the Word of God. He went there to preach. *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."* If you'll permit me, my sermon today will be a bit longer than His.

The Word and preaching ... that's what the commandment is about: "Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy" (Ex. 20:8). Luther explains: "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it" (Small Catechism, Explanation to Third Commandment). We come here on Sundays to partake of the Word of God and to hear preaching on it.

And the purpose of this Word and the purpose of this preaching is to point us to Jesus; its purpose is to engender faith in Jesus. So we see in the Gospel today.

Jesus went to church today. He was given a scroll — the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. Jesus Himself unrolled the scroll. Jesus Himself found a place in the scroll where Isaiah had written about Him. He had lots of choices, but today the True Light (John 1:9) shone His light upon this Old Testament prophecy, and that lamp illumined who the Christ would be: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me"*

That's what it means to be the Christ — He is the anointed one. And although anointings were done with oil in the Bible, Jesus' anointing was by the Holy Spirit in His baptism. You recall how the Spirit came down upon Jesus in the form of a dove. Peter proclaims it: *"you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power"* (Acts 10:37-38).

His Messianic office thus established, Isaiah proceeds to tell us what the Christ would do: He would preach and teach, proclaiming *"good news to the poor,"* proclaiming *"liberty to the captives,"* proclaiming *"the year of the Lord's favor."*

Jesus' coming was indeed good news to the poor and downtrodden. They flocked to Him, and He not only preached good news to them, but He demonstrated it, healing their sick, casting out demons, giving sight to those who were blind and opening the ears of those who could not hear, causing those who were lame to walk. What Isaiah prophesied, Jesus, as He said, fulfilled.

Jesus' coming, though, was not just good news in things temporal, for when Isaiah speaks about setting the oppressed free and proclaiming liberty to the captives, He is speaking of things eternal, of release from sin and the law. St. Paul

explains it in his letter to the Galatians: *“the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin ... Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed”* (Gal. 3:22-23).

That coming faith — that is, the faith which is believed (Jude 1:3) — was revealed in the fullness of time. Jesus, God's Son, born of woman was revealed. He was born under the law so that He, by His death, might redeem us imprisoned by this law and sin (Gal. 4:4-5). And we who have been baptized into Christ, baptized into His death ... we have died with Christ, and we have been set free from sin (Rom. 6:3, 7). Again, St. Paul: *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death”* (Rom. 8:1-2). Again, *“For freedom Christ has set us free”* (Gal. 5:1); again, *“you were called to freedom”* (Gal. 5:13).

Jesus went to church today. He stood up to read from the Book, so that all the people could see Him, even as Ezra the priest was above all the assembly as they heard God's word read to them — as our chancel is, and especially the pulpit. All the people's eyes were fixed on Jesus as He preached His brief sermon: *“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”* — that is, in Jesus Himself. These words have hints of what Mark records at the beginning of Jesus' ministry: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15).

But the people didn't believe. To be sure, the people were amazed by His words, but amazement and marveling are not the same thing as believing. They even spoke well of Jesus, at least, at first. But that quickly turned south, and the text makes clear that, although the goal of preaching is engendering faith in Christ Jesus, not all preaching results in faith, not even Jesus' own preaching.

The people quickly turned on their hometown boy, for although He did no signs like they wanted Him to do, like He had done at Capernaum, He did look into their hearts and found no faith. *“Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown,”* and He compared them to unfaithful Israel at the time of Elijah and Elisha.

The people were livid. They rose up against Jesus, cast Him out of the synagogue, out of the city. They dragged Jesus to the brow of the hill. The ESV has “led” him, but that sounds too placid to me; this assembly became a mob, and this mob surely manhandled Jesus, bringing Him to the cliff's edge so they could throw Him off and kill Him. But as Jesus said last week, *“My hour has not yet come”* (John 2:4), and as is surely true as Jesus begins His ministry here in Luke, it was not yet time for Jesus to die. And so, Jesus did still another sign: He turned around and passed *“through their midst,”* and went on to His next preaching gig.

Jesus went to church today, that is, to the synagogue. It was His custom to do so. No doubt His parents had developed this habit in Him. Remember, they kept the festivals “*according to custom*” (Luke 2:42), and probably had a habit of going to synagogue in Nazareth also. Jesus continued it. Jesus, in His active obedience, perfectly kept this commandment along with all others for us.

Not all habits are good, and how easy it is it seems to develop bad habits when compared to the good. Indeed, how easy it has been during this pandemic to develop bad habits, sinful habits of “*neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some,*” as the writer to the Hebrews talks about. How easy it has been for some, with the service live-streamed on YouTube, to remain at home, perhaps still in pajamas and slippers with a cup of coffee or hot cocoa, and forsake the brotherhood and the benefits of stirring “*up one another to love and good works*” and “*encouraging one another*” (Heb. 10:24-25). It was one thing to do that when the virus was novel, and we didn't know much about it, when we were under executive orders by the state not to gather or gather in groups of 10 because not even the government knew much about this virus, when there were no mitigating vaccines and therapeutics to combat the virus.

It's different now. We know now. We've had opportunity to protect ourselves with a vaccine. We know it's best to stay home if we're sick with what we think may be a cold. Even before COVID we knew about hand hygiene — washing up and using sanitizer. We had our “fist-bump” Sundays. We knew to cough or sneeze into our elbows (though old habits are hard to break).

We're coming up on the two-year anniversary of learning about this novel coronavirus. It's not novel any more. Moreover, Jesus didn't keep the Sabbath commandment so that we might break it. This I say to all but especially to those who have not rejoined us and are watching at home. It's time to reestablish your habit of gathering together with your fellow Christians, as Christ's example shows.

It's time to assemble together again with your fellow believers here, as the people gathered before Ezra, as the people gathered together in the synagogue, in obedience to the commandment, to be in the presence of Christ, to receive the grace He has given to His church to distribute: “the spoken Word, by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world”; “Baptism,” the Trinitarian words in the water that poured over you are never far away at church; “the holy Sacrament of the Altar,” Christ's body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins — you can't get this over the internet; “the Power of the Keys, Christ's authority given to the Church to forgive and retain sins; and also “the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren,” the encouraging and stirring up that we heard about earlier (Smalcald Articles, Article IV The Gospel).

So, come to church — like Jesus did! Assemble! Come into His presence! Receive His grace. Have your faith in Christ strengthened. And go forth, living your life without fear, in the freedom of Christ, in the knowledge that you're living in the Lord's favor.

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.