

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

It often seems to me that we Americans worship at the altar of choice — perhaps the whole world does. It’s part of our consumer-driven culture, I think. “*Have it your way!*” went one restaurant jingle. People like to apply that consumer maxim to all parts of their life, including church.

Consider a 2009 poll conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life. It found “*that large numbers of Americans engage in multiple religious practices, mixing elements of diverse traditions. Many say they attend worship services of more than one faith or denomination — even when they are not traveling or going to special events like weddings and funerals. Many also blend Christianity with Eastern or New Age beliefs such as reincarnation, astrology and the presence of spiritual energy in physical objects.*” The report mentions diverse kinds of religious experiences, I would even call occult.

Finding ourselves in this religious ether, it’s no wonder that many people also want to choose the kind of “*Messiah they want.*” Have Jesus your way!

It’s not just now, but then, for that’s what we have in the Gospel lesson for today, too. The people of Nazareth wanted a certain kind of Christ, and they became enraged when Jesus showed them just what kind of Christ He would be.

And indeed, Jesus is the Christ He instructs the people as He reads from the prophet Isaiah, and applies it to Himself. “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.*” Of course, we have recently heard again how Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, and how what Isaiah prophesies was fulfilled: the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove came down from heaven and lighted upon Jesus.

“*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me*”— this is what makes Him the Christ that was proclaimed at His birth: His anointing. And that happened when Jesus was baptized, for St. Peter tells us that in His baptism He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power—the power to do the Father’s pleasure.

And it was the Father’s pleasure that Jesus “*proclaim good news to the poor.*” Here is His purpose for bestowing His Spirit upon Jesus—that the Christ might preach forth the powerful Gospel message of our salvation. And not just for those who have little money — it’s for those who are poor in spirit, those who are humble before the Lord. It’s for the lowly, the afflicted, the weak, the foolish according to the world’s standards. And those who hear this message of Christ and believe it—not a self-chosen message, but Christ’s message—they are blessed, and theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

God’s desire is that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, and so He sends that Truth down from heaven with a purpose —to make our salvation

a reality, to save us by cross and resurrection and by the preaching of this Good News of the cross. You see, Scripture equates these two: if the Gospel is the power of God for salvation and the word of the cross is the power of God, then the word of the cross is the Gospel, and it’s by this word that we are saved.

Jesus continues, *“He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed”*—here again Christ is speaking more broadly than just of those in prison. He’s speaking of mankind being held captive to the law, oppressed by sin and Satan. St. Paul says, *“Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.”* Again, *“the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”*

Your liberty comes from listening to Jesus’ words and believing them—faith comes by hearing the word of Christ. Your liberty comes from being in Christ Jesus, from being baptized into Him as St. Paul says, *“[f]or in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”* For *“the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”* Incorporated into Christ by baptism, you become children of the promise, children of the free woman, set free to love God and serve neighbor.

Your liberty comes from dying with Christ by baptism, rising again with Him, and in this way being *“released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”* In Christ, you have been set free from the bondage of the Law, free to live as new creations in Christ, free to live in righteousness and purity, image restored, free to live as hands and feet, eyes and ears in the body of Him who was oppressed for our sake, that He might release you from oppression and free you to live for Him.

Jesus said more, *“He has sent me to proclaim ...recovering of sight to the blind”*—To be sure, Jesus healed many as He walked among the people—He gave sight to the blind. But again, the blindness that Isaiah is speaking about here, and that Jesus addresses, is more than physical blindness. Jesus said in the Gospel of John, *“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”* Far worse than physical blindness is the spiritual blindness that afflicts mankind. Jesus reminds the lukewarm church in Laodicea how they considered themselves rich and prosperous and needing nothing, not realizing that they are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. And Jesus warns them that He will spit them out of His mouth. *“Buy from me, ... salve,”* Jesus says, *“to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.”* Yes, Jesus gives sight to us who are spiritually blind that we might fix our eyes upon Him.

*“He has sent me ... to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”* And Jesus says

that time is “*Today.*” “*Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.*” So it is for us: “*now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*”

Today, it is fulfilled also in your hearing. For the Father had Jesus anointed and sent Jesus from His side, not that sinful man might fashion Jesus into the idol of their choosing, but that He would effect the Father’s plan of salvation and proclaim it to poor and needy sinners. Christ came to do the Father’s will, and that meant going to a cross, being the perfect sacrifice for sin, the spotless Lamb slain for the sins of the world, and being raised again from the dead. And this is the Good News I proclaim to you that you may look to the Son and believe in Him and be saved, for there is salvation in no one else. God grant that you, too, may carry the Good news of this Jesus — the real Jesus, not a self-chosen one, but the One who fulfills the prophetic testimony — to those in your circle of influence.

To be sure, not all will hear this Good news for their good. Many people then didn’t receive the good news from Jesus about Jesus for their good. They rejected it; they rejected Him; they even tried to kill Him. They didn’t believe. So it is today. Many reject the Good news; many reject Jesus; some remake Jesus into the Messiah they want; others try to expunge the name of Jesus from all public discourse. Their hearts are hardened. Don’t be troubled; don’t be deterred; the problem is theirs not yours

But to those who do receive this Good news, He gives the right to become children of God—born of the will of God, born of water and the Spirit, made part of the body of Christ, destined for the bliss of heaven.

Yes, those who did receive it in that day, when Jesus went to synagogue and read the Word of God, they believed in Him, and every eye was fixed on Him. So as your pastor, my great desire for you is that having been baptized into Jesus, and confirmed in this faith, you may fix your eyes upon Him; that your ears may be attentive to His every word, and that your mouths may confess Him as Lord unto the end; for then God’s ultimate desire will come to pass: you will be among the great multitude that has come to the knowledge of the truth, has endured to the end and are saved. God grant it for Jesus’ sake.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.