I don't know if you noticed the theme of today's sermon printed in our bulletin. Guest Preacher Today: Jesus. I hope you were not too disappointed to see me walking up to the pulpit and not Jesus. The sermon is titled that because today in our reading, Luke records an instance when Jesus was the guest preacher. What was his sermon like? What did he preach about? What was the reaction of the crowd? All of these fascinating details are recorded for us.

But what is most important for us is to examine the content of his sermon. Because although Jesus is not physically standing before you preaching today, the message he shared in that synagogue 2,000 years ago, is the very same message he preaches to us today.

Jesus has some important words for you today - he has a message of good news, freedom, release and God’s favor.

We are in the season of the church year called Epiphany. It is a word that means to appear or manifest or reveal. What have we seen revealed so far in the Epiphany season? Well, we have seen the Wise men show up in Bethlehem, revealing that this child is the long promises Messiah and Savior - not just of the Jews, but of the whole world. We have heard of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan river, where the Father and the Holy Spirit revealed this was God’s Son. Jesus’ mission of salvation had begun. Last week, we heard of Jesus’ first miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding of Cana. Jesus revealed by his power that he truly was the Son of God, possessing the power of God. Today is another revelation, another Epiphany, about Jesus and it is made in the sermon he preached. Let’s listen now to the time when Jesus was guest preacher at the synagogue in Nazareth.

Luke tells us: Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through all the surrounding area. He was teaching in their synagogues and being honored by everyone. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As was his custom, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where he would read from.

Jesus had been preaching and teaching in other areas of Israel and now returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit. He had been anointed and commissioned at his baptism. Now with the help of the Holy Spirit, Jesus had begun his teaching ministry. News of Jesus spread all around the area. It is interesting to note that Luke does not mention Jesus performing miracles at this time.

Why, then, was there so much talk about Jesus? Our reading says he was honored by everyone. In many places, Scripture says that people were amazed when they listened to Jesus teach. He did not have hesitations or doubts or second thoughts as he preached God’s Word. He was not boring. He did not philosophize. He was never caught off guard by a question. In short, Jesus’ teaching was amazing because Jesus spoke as one having authority.

Our text says: AS was his custom, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Jesus’ normal behavior was to keep the 3rd Commandment - always. We often talk of Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross, but just as important for our salvation was that fact that he lived a perfect life in our place and on our behalf. Our text makes it clear that Jesus always kept the 3rd Commandment by regular attendance at the synagogue. And we might ask ourselves this as well - if Jesus considered it vitally important to be in church every week, shouldn’t we also?

So Jesus went into the synagogue. A synagogue was a place of worship on the Sabbath. It was also a place of instruction. Even after the Jews returned to Israel and the
temple was rebuilt, they still continued the custom of meeting in synagogues. Synagogues had one leader who had an assistant.

The worship service in the Jewish synagogue was very similar to what we still use today. Psalms were sung and prayers were spoken. A selection from one of the first 5 books of the Bible, the ones written by Moses, was usually read. Then a selection from one of the books of the prophets like Jeremiah or Isaiah or Ezekiel was also read. These selections were then explained in some sort of a sermon. Usually the one in charge of the Bible scrolls would request another rabbi or teacher to read the lessons and speak. Jesus was readily granted permission to read the reading and preach.

The original listeners to Jesus’ sermon literally hung on his every word. Imagine that crowded synagogue that day. The hush that fell over the crowd as the sacred scroll was brought forward and Jesus unrolled the scroll, deliberately looking for the exact Scripture he had in mind. He read the words from Isaiah 61. He wanted to read this specific Scripture because it did two things: it highlighted the people’s need and it highlighted what he came to do. And truth is, we have the very same needs as Jesus’ original audience, and what Jesus came to do applies to us just as much as it applied to them. So today, Jesus will be our guest preacher with exactly the message we need to hear today.

After reading the text: The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began to tell them, Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. The bomb was dropped. Jesus was not only going to share a message from God with these people that day – he would not only convey God’s truth to them - but he tells them he is the one who fulfills that Word of God. He is the anointed one spoken of in that text. He not only speaks God’s Word, but he IS God’s Word. He not only conveys God’s promise, he IS God’s promise. And this is true for us today every bit as much as it was true for them. Let’s look at those words from Isaiah and see how Jesus was the fulfillment.

Jesus read the following words: The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

This prophecy from Isaiah is written in the first person. It was originally spoken to Israelites who had been taken captive in Babylon. They longed for release and to return to the land of Israel. With the words Jesus read, Isaiah had brought good news to these captives.

But was he foretelling their release from captivity or was he foretelling a much greater event: the coming of the Messiah? Isaiah was directly prophesying the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah’s words speak of greater things than just a return from captivity. Israel was restored, but even after their return from captivity, they were still an oppressed people. They never returned to the glory days of David. Isaiah was referring to the time when the Messiah would come.

Jesus was anointed or set apart to help poor people. But poor people he is referring to are not those who are homeless or who stand in line at soup kitchens. They are those who are poor in spirit. He came to help those who stand before God knowing they are spiritually bankrupt, with an unpayable debt to God caused by countless sins and offenses. When Judgment Day comes, we stand before God penniless when it comes to the righteousness and holiness he requires. The poor in spirit realize they deserve nothing from God except anger and punishment.

We might pause and ask: But aren’t all spiritually poor? So wasn’t Jesus anointed to preach good news to all people? It is true that all are bankrupt before God, but many do not acknowledge it or believe it. Many believe that they have sufficient righteousness and good works to pay their way into heaven. They see themselves as rich. So they will not accept any handouts from Jesus. Such people are not prepared to hear what Jesus has to
say. He has no good news for such people.

How about you? Are you poor? Wiped out? Penniless before God? Do you acknowledge your righteousness amounts to nothing more than a pile of filthy rags? Our guest preacher, Jesus, stands before you today with some very good news. **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich.** Jesus came to our world to fill up our bank account, not with something as worthless as gold or silver. He fills up our spiritual bank account with the righteousness and holiness that God requires of us. He took our spiritual poverty upon self, taking our place. And from him we become rich, having all we need for eternal life with God. That is good news Jesus preaches to us poor people today!

Jesus was also sent to **proclaim freedom to the captives.** This term literally means **prisoners of war.** Prisoners back then were often treated cruelly and brutally – there was no Geneva Convention dictating how prisoners of war were to be treated. They were at the mercy of whoever captured them. That is a good description of how we are by nature. We are captured by Satan and imprisoned by sin. We cannot escape. We are caught in a sinful world with sinful lives with much suffering and little hope.

But Jesus proclaims freedom! With his holy, precious blood Jesus bought us back from Satan’s prison. Jesus paid the ransom that was necessary for our release. Sin, death and the devil no longer have any claim to us. We are redeemed by the blood of God’s own Son.

Jesus also gives **recovery of sight to the blind.** Sin has blinded us to the proper way to attain union with God. We see none of his glory or light. But Jesus through his Gospel shows that the way to God is through him. He is the way, the truth and the life. He opens our eyes and gives us sight and we are in awe of God’s glory and love.

Jesus also came to **set free those who are oppressed.** The guilt of our sins often weighs heavy upon us. It oppresses us. We feel trapped under our sin and see no way out. Through his work in our place he removed the guilt of the sins that weigh so heavy upon us. He has set us free.

Isaiah wrote that the Messiah would **proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.** He is alluding to the Year of Jubilee. This was a special year that would occur every 50 years. In that year, all slaves were freed, all property was returned to its original owners and all debts canceled or forgiven. That special year was a clear foreshadowing of the unconditional, complete and undeserved forgiveness that would come through the Messiah. Since time of Jesus and continuing until he comes again in glory is one long Year of Jubilee for God’s children. Jesus has forgiven every spiritual debt that we owe through his perfect life and innocent death.

What a blessed message we have heard today from our guest preacher, Jesus. He has revealed something amazing: he is the one who fulfills the prophecies of Scripture. All of God’s promises to Old Testament believers are completed in him. Jesus’ message to us today gives great hope, peace and joy. You are rich. You are free. You are released. You are under God’s favor. What is your response to this? Believe! Rejoice! Serve God with all your time, talents and treasures. And finally, share this sermon of Jesus that you heard today with everyone you can. May his name be praised by more and more. Amen.

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