

***“Real Power is Filled with Mercy”***

Time and time again I keep thinking of the blessings that God has given us. In reflecting on the last year, as we will in pictures at the annual meeting. I talked with the bishop to apologize that I will not be able to be in Tallahassee for the Diocesan Council meeting on Friday and Saturday, because my place is here. He sent his love to the family and the church family. In the last two weeks we have heard of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, which our Bishop, Neil Lebarh preached on, and then of the first recorded miracle, Jesus changing water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana. In between these events was a stretch of forty days and nights during which Jesus was taunted and tempted by Satan in the wilderness. He wasn't just tempted – but He was taunted – Satan was dancing on His buttons – trying to push them and get Him to respond. Jesus was tempted but did not sin! After the wilderness, it was time for Him to come ministering to the people that He was sent to save, the people of Israel – and ultimately the world.

Jesus then began His public ministry – heading toward the Galilee, collecting some of His Apostles and followers and returning to His hometown, to Nazareth. The wedding feast of Cana was a short journey from Nazareth, like heading to Broxton from Douglas. It was after the wedding feast that Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath, filled with the Holy Spirit.

In this Gospel reading it was time to stand before His own home town. He knew everybody there and they knew Him. How many times can you go into a place and people recognize you, or you are standing with someone who has been here all their life. I have only been here a little over four years, but it is amazing about who knows who, and who is related to who, and who know what about who! It is amazing. People even recognize me when I am in a polo and jeans! It is like I am out of uniform and people shouldn't recognize me, but they do!

When Jesus opened the scroll, which as we read was His custom, what happened next was not what the people were expecting. In next week's Gospel reading we will see how the people reacted and what they reacted to! I will share with you some coming attractions to that but, there is too much to talk about in one sermon, and because the Gospel continues next week – and so will we.

The first words that Jesus spoke when He opened the scroll was declaring that He had the POWER of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word *δυναμει* “duna-my” means power. Do you recognize the root –dynamo, dynamic, dynamite? John the Baptist said when he baptized Jesus and recognized Him as the Messiah? He said, *"I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'*" (John 1:33) By Jesus taking and opening the scroll of Isaiah that was handed to Him, and opening to Isaiah 61; I am going to ask you to open your Pew Bibles to page 1159 – Jesus began with these very telling

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words: "*The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" (Luke 4:18-19) Jesus left off there, ironically enough, He stopped right in the middle of the verse without reading the next line about God in Isaiah 61:2 which says, "*and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn.*" He was also referring to Isaiah 58:6 "*to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke.*" Then Jesus sat down to teach. Any good Jewish rabbi sat down to teach. In the synagogues in first century Israel you would find benches built in stone around the perimeter – and the rabbi would sit down to teach while the people sat down to listen. When Jesus added, "*today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,*" the insinuation was so very clear. Yes, Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah who could deliver the Kingdom of God which had been promised for so very, very long—but this was not Jesus' time to declare judgement, and so He omitted "*the day of vengeance of our God*" (Isaiah 61:2). The crowd was mesmerized, they were spellbound by His teaching and the eyes of everyone were fastened upon Him. Jesus' words plainly stated that the offer of the favorable year of the Lord, the fact that the kingdom of God was now being made available to them through Him. He was referring to the Jewish feast or festival of Jubilee which took place every seven years. During each Jubilee debts were forgiven, people returned to their family homelands, and tremendous, amazing things happened. Mercy happened. Jesus was saying that God was doing something special, and that He was coming to heal people, to bring the good news of God's message for His people – and ultimately to the world.

The people were amazed or marveled – the Greek word ἐθαύμαζον (*ethaumazon*) shows how they "marveled" "*at the gracious words that came from His lips.*" (Luke 4:22) Sometimes people have understood this simply to mean, they were amazed at what a good speaker He was. But immediately after the verses of today's Gospel they began to question the authority with which Jesus could say these things. I used to think that the crowd got unruly because of what Jesus said when He said, "*today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,*" but something else happened. Here are some insights to the rest of the Gospel story that we will read next week. After these verses the people questioned His authority - how could Joseph's Son, the Boy they saw grow up in their town be the Messiah? They couldn't see the clear picture! In next week's Gospel reading we will see the continuation of this event and the outcome of Jesus' visit to the synagogue to the point of the people of Nazareth, in Jesus' hometown, wanting to kill Him.

So what was wrong with what Jesus said? What made these people, who He knew all His life, kick Him out of the synagogue, try to hurry Him out of the town, and take Him off to the cliff edge to throw him over? It is not that they disliked His delivery of the Word, they thought it was eloquent. The decisive part is Jesus' comments to these people. What was wrong with what He was saying? He would go on to make points about the great prophets Elijah and Elisha, and so He identifies himself with the prophets. This was more than they could handle. Elijah was sent to help a widow – but not a Jewish one. Elisha healed a leper – and the leper was the commander of the Gentile enemy army. That's what did it. It wasn't Jesus' saying that "*today*

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*this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing*” that drove them with anger and hostility. It was because Jesus was saying that God was rescuing BOTH Jew and Gentile. These people were waiting for God to liberate them from their pagan enemies, the Gentile, and not for their enemies to be saved too.

Jesus chose the passage, Isaiah 61 in which He quotes about the Messiah. Throughout Isaiah there are pictures of this mysterious ‘anointed’ person who will perform God’s will. He speaks of Israel being called to be the light of the nations. Anytime you read in the Bible about “nations” it is not talking about Israel but instead the term ‘nations’ meaning Gentiles. The suffering servant spoken of by Isaiah in chapter 53 is amazing. Let’s look at this on page 1147 of the Pew Bible - (Isaiah 53:4-5) "*Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.*" "*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.*" Jesus came not only to save the lost people from suffering of an eternal fire and to save people who God loved – and God loves everyone! It gives people an opportunity to receive something special; by His stripes, by His wounds – we are healed. Nothing that we can do can save ourselves! We do not have it within us – we NEED a Savior – and we are healed by Him. He took our iniquities, our sin, upon Himself.

Jesus, the Messiah, did not come to inflict punishment on the nations, but to bring God’s love and mercy to them. Do you know what mercy is? Mercy is NOT getting what you deserve. If you think about what we deserve – God’s mercy abounds. Do you see the connection? Jesus’ claim to be reaching out with healing to ALL people was not what most first-century Jews wanted or expected. Jesus warned that unless they could see that this was the time for their God to be gracious, unless they abandoned their futile dreams of a military victory over their national enemies, they would suffer defeat themselves at every level – military, political and theological. You see what was coming from 66 to 70 AD, Jerusalem was destroyed, by who – the Romans. The Temple was destroyed – by who – the Romans! And even the people at Masada were destroyed by who - the Romans. Jesus’ challenge and warning to them brings about a violent reaction. Next week we will look further at what happened that Sabbath day at the synagogue in Nazareth. We will see and hear about a surprising measure of God’s mercy and grace for all people. We will see the reaction of Jesus’ hometown to their beloved Son. Next week we will uncover the rest of the story.