

“WWJD: WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?” Luke 4:16-30, Epiphany 3-C, Jan 27, 2019

A man shared a personal story with **READERS DIGEST MAGAZINE** years ago, about something rather personal, that happened to him, early one evening, just as he stepped out of the shower! That’s when his wife called out to him from the kitchen: **“Hey, Tom, could you please run to the basement and unplug the iron? I just realized that I forgot to do that, when I finished my ironing this afternoon!”**

WITHOUT BOTHERING TO GRAB A TOWEL OR A BATHROBE, TOM HEADED DOWNSTAIRS TOWARDS THE BASEMENT. Just as he reached the bottom step, the lights came on and a dozen family members and friends jumped out from behind the furniture and yelled: **“SURPRISE!”**

You see, Tom’s wife **had planned a SURPRISE BIRTHDAY PARTY for him on his 40th Birthday**, although she had no idea than when her husband would arrive on the scene, that he would, quite literally, be wearing his **“BIRTHDAY SUIT”!**

The moral of this story is that not all surprises, we experience in this life, turn out to be good ones! And isn’t this how it was also for our Lord and Savior Jesus, when early in his public ministry, he accepted an invitation to become the **guest preacher in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth?**

I am sure that Jesus must have selected the Biblical text, he was going to base his sermon on, **very prayerfully, very thoughtfully and very carefully**, which reminds me of something else I read this past week. Someone has said that **just as every human being always remembers their first kiss, so every Ordained Minister of the Gospel, always remember preaching their first sermon!**

When Jesus arrived at the synagogue in Nazareth, on that Sabbath Day, he knew which text he was going to preach on. That’s why he asked to be handed to him the **largest scroll in the synagogue that day**, comprising the longest book in entire Old Testament; some 66 chapters long!

And I am sure that Jesus also required some assistance in opening that big scroll of the Hebrew Scriptures to just the right place.

Then Jesus read, with his beautiful voice, from the **61ST CHAPTER OF ISAIAH**: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to **proclaim good new to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19)!***

And then, just as soon down on the designated chair behind the pulpit that day, as the custom was, as was certain that he had the eyes of everyone present there that day totally riveted upon him, he announced: *“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*

“SURPRISE,” friends? Do you want to talk about a surprise?

The Prophet Isaiah had been inspired to write down these words some 600 to 700 years, before our Savior was born in prophecy of the coming Promised Messiah!

Friend, before I speak to you about the reaction of the hometown congregation to Jesus’ sermon, I first would like to speak to you about why I believe Jesus chose this particular-passage from the Old Testament, as the basis for his sermon!

First of all, the God revealed to all the world in Jesus Christ, is a God of Hope! And wherever Jesus went, he brought hope to hurting and broken people!

Bringing hope to human beings was Jesus’ number one “calling-card!”

Already, in other places in Galilee, **Jesus had cured lepers**, so that rather than their continuing to be **totally ostracized and quarantined from their family members, their loved ones, and the business associates**, they could **resume a rightful place** in that first century Hebrew Society again.

Jesus brought hope to the paralyzed man who was unable to care for his family.

To people who felt worthless, or lost, or broken, or rejected, or beyond saving, **Jesus brought the message that God loved them—and that The LORD God Almighty most definitely had a purpose for their lives! had a purpose in life.**

Even in Jesus' last moments, when he was dying in agony on the cross, he offered the hope of eternal salvation to the thief dying beside him. This was Jesus' first act in life and his last act before death--the giving of hope.

Secondly, by Jesus choosing this text from Isaiah 61, he is reminding us that our Heavenly Father is a God of Justice. Before Jesus arrived on the scene there was a lot of **BAD THEOLOGY** that had infiltrated, not only the world, but that also had found its way into the Old Testament Community of Believers.

The false assumption was made that you get what you deserve in this life.

If you are poor, God must want you to be poor and that if you were sick or disabled, it was because God was punishing you for your sins; maybe even for some sin that you may have committed 20 years earlier in your past life!

It was a simple and straightforward assumption: Health and wealth are blessings from God, and if you don't have health and wealth, then God must not love you!

Jesus came to turn this worldview completely upside down. He came to declare that God loves the poor, the blind, the sick and the oppressed; who were oftentimes, Jesus taught, far more receptive and willing to hear and believe the good news of the Gospel; precisely because of their humble estate.

Luke records these words of Jesus in chapter 6:20, "*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God!*"

Thirdly, Jesus' announcement tells us that our God is a God of freedom. And the number one way is that God longs to FREE US IS TO FORGIVE US, from ALL OF OUR GUILT AND SHAME AND TO FREE US ALSO FROM HOLDING ON, UNNECESSARILY, TO AN UNFORGIVING SPIRIT!

Do you remember that episode in Jesus' ministry recorded for us in THE 8TH CHAPTER OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL? It's about a woman that was caught in the act of adultery? And the pious Pharisees come up to Jesus saying, "**Lord, Moses, commanded that we should stone a person like this, but what do you say?**" Jesus said, "**Let the person who is without sin, cast the first stone!**" (John 8:7)! **And strangely enough, all the men present began to drop their stones and walk away; and John says the older men dropped their stones and walked away first!** The longer we live upon this earth, the more the Holy Spirit of God convicts us of our sin, but it's also true, that the longer we live on this earth, the more the HOLY SPIRIT MAKES THE COMPLETE FORGIVENESS OF ALL OUR SINS A CHIEF REALITY IN OUR LIVES!

IT WAS AN ASTOUNDING CLAIM THAT JESUS WAS MAKING FOR HIMSELF IN THE SYNAGOGUE, AMONG THE PEOPLE WHO HAD KNOW JESUS FROM THE TIME HE WAS A BOY; BEING RAISED UP BY MARY AND JOSEPH IN NAZARETH!

Jesus said in no uncertain terms: "*TODAY, THIS SCRIPTURE HAS BEEN FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING!*"

Initially, St. Luke tells us, all the people present spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came forth from his mouth! But then somebody said, "**Hold on a minute! Hold on just one cotton-pickin' moment! Is not this Joseph's son?**"

Though the words the people are speaking certainly seemed favorable, that phrase "**spoke well of,**" may also simply mean, "**bore witness to!**" That is, they heard his sermon and they began to talk about it, and evaluate it, **but not necessarily "approve" of it!**

And as far as the hometown's people in Nazareth being "**amazed**" at Jesus' sermon, this can actually "**cut two ways!**" Either like, "**Wow! We've never heard anything like this before, isn't this is wonderful!**" Or rather with a rather sharp tone of disapproval: "**Whoa! We've never heard**

anything like that before! Is not this Joseph's son?" Well, this could also cut both ways! Either, "Wow! How about that Joseph's boy! Isn't he something! A chip off the old block! Why he's Nazareth's favorite son! We are so proud of him!"

Or, "Hold on a minute! This is Joseph's kid! He's just a local laborer like the rest of us!

What gives him the right, therefore, to speak to us, with all of these 'high falluting claims!' Who does he think he is? He's getting above his raising!"]

Do you get my point? Is the crowd's reaction: "**Wow!**"? Or "**Whoa!**"?

I would venture to say that it was probably a little bit of both! This stunned congregation of worshipers just isn't sure what to make of this **NEW JESUS OF NAZARETH; the Son of Joseph!**"

Of course, 2000 years later, each of us, by the grace of God, are more clued in than were those people standing there in the synagogue in Nazareth, surrounding Jesus there that day.

"Isn't this Joseph's son?"

"Well, no he isn't not really! For the child growing in Mary's womb some 30 years before this was not fathered as Joseph's own child! Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary!

St. Luke has taught us in the opening chapters of his Gospel account that this is **not in fact, "Jesus, the Son of Joseph,"** but instead "**God's Son in human flesh; conceived by God's Spirit, but in Mary's womb!**"

But we do not know if anyone else present there that day, would have known this, except for Joseph and Mary!

"Is this not Joseph's Son?" No, it is not! This is God's Son becoming one of us; God coming into our world, as close as you can get, to one of us! Therefore, they lay violent hands on Jesus and try, even, to ring his neck!

Somehow, Jesus manages to escape the lynching and go on his way. And the words of Jesus, certainly in this instance proved to be true: "A prophet is not without honor except in his home town!"

But what in the world did Jesus say, in that sermon to set his listeners off like that?

This was not just some petty grumbling over lunch, about how the preacher went on preaching a bit too long, or how he must have said something a bit controversial. This was "**mob action,**" an attempted murder. **Why? Why?**

Well, first, right after reading this Isaiah passage, Jesus flat out announces: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing!"

To us, this may not immediately seem to be all that provocative, but upon our taking a much closer look at these words of Jesus, can't we see how they must have also really packed a wallop to Jesus' listeners seated there that day---to people who thought that they knew him, who thought that they really knew him, but when in fact they really didn't know him at all?

And so, upon the risk of my not being accepted here this morning, as a prophet in my hometown either, is it possible: **THAT THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE SEATED AMONG US THIS MORNING WHO THINK THAT THEY MAY KNOW JESUS, BUT WHO DO NOT REALLY KNOW JESUS AT ALL?**

No matter how well we know him, we too, can also come to know him better and better as we make our way throughout this life, with our eyes fixed, the writer of Hebrews says in chapter 12: "With our eyes fixed on the Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despised the shame and is not seated at the right hand of God!"

The first time that Jesus' listeners heard him saying to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing!" this must have been a shocking announcement to them indeed!

But what Jesus is saying here is that not only has he come among us in fulfillment of all of the Old Testament Scriptures but that he was also the very human embodiment of God's whole disposition and approach to our fallen

human race. Jesus is saying to the people back then something that was **absolutely new, and totally mind-boggling!**

Jesus made the Holy Scriptures of the OLD TESTAMENT his very own to a breath-taking degree! These Old Testament Scriptures would not simply inform Jesus' life, and inspire his life and enrich his life. These Holy Scripture will find their total and complete fulfillment in his living out his life!

Jesus will not just read the book, study the book, and proclaim the book, he will live the book! While Jesus embodies the Holy Scriptures to a consummate degree that we can never hope to achieve, he still sets the pattern for us to follow!

As disciples of Christ, we are being called upon to walk in the way that he walked and to live as he lived, as best we can!

And our text makes it plain that a big part of a Christ-following life involves bringing good news to the poor, and liberating love to those bound by a legion of demons: physically, psychologically, spiritually; liberating the **WHOLE PERSON!**

It sets the agenda really for his entire life and work! You can read the rest of Luke from this point to the end, and almost everything Jesus does fits into this "Isaiah Profile" of the coming Messiah! In the 1990's there was a SLOGAN that became very popular among many Christians that was promoted by believers wearing those elastic bracelets with the four letters WWJD, STAMPED UPON THEM. IN OTHER WORDS: "WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?"

But if we really want to know: "What would Jesus do?" And "What should we do as Jesus followers?" we are best advised to look at what Jesus did in the pages of the New Testament Gospels! He brought good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, and in our still, very-broken, fractured world, that's plenty to keep us busy until Christ comes and restores all creation!

We are to be committed to "INCARNATING THE BOOK IN OUR LIVES," as Jesus did, for the sake of those who are bound up and beaten down! And again, I stress that this is not easy to do at all!

And yet this good news of Jesus is not just for people who look like us and who think like us! It is not just for our cozy little congregation here! IT'S FOR EVERYBODY AND ITS FOR ALL SORTS OF PEOPLE! REMEMBER ELIJAH? There Jesus goes, bringing in more Scripture again! Remember how that great prophet helped a destitute widow across the Israeli border, in the Sidonian Land of Zaraphath! He provided food for her and her son, in the middle of a terrible famine, and also raised up her son from death, who had died at one point!

"And remember Elisha, too," Jesus goes on *"how he cured the leprosy of that snooty Syrian General, Naaman, who thought his people and lands were better than that of the Israelites. When Elisha told him to go and wash in the Jordan Rivers 7 times, to be cleansed of his leprosy, the mighty and powerful, self-righteous Naaman initially objected! Why the waters in the Syrian "Phar-Phar River" were much cleaner than the waters in the Jordan River.*

It's his little Hebrew house girl who convinces Naaman not to let his pride get the best of him! So, here we are again today, poised to come in a spirit of deep humility before our Lord's Table and to receive the very gifts of his true Body and true Blood today? And God the Holy Spirit invites us to do so with a correct understanding of whom our Savior is!

Who is Jesus Christ? "I believe that Jesus Christ is true God begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true Man born of the Virgin Mary, who has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, and who has purchased and won me from all sins, death, and the power of the devil, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with his holy precious blood, his innocent sufferings and death, all that I might be his own and live with him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity! This is most certainly true!" (Luther's Explanation to the 2nd Article of the Apostles' Creed, SMALL CATECHISM). **AMEN**