



LESSONS

NEHEMIAH 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10  
PSALM 19 (7)  
1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31A  
ST. LUKE 4:14-21

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

**BLESSED LORD GOD, YOU  
HAVE CAUSED THE HOLY  
SCRIPTURES TO BE WRITTEN  
FOR THE NOURISHMENT OF  
YOUR PEOPLE. GRANT THAT  
WE MAY HEAR THEM, READ,  
MARK, LEARN, AND  
INWARDLY DIGEST THEM,  
THAT, COMFORTED BY YOUR  
PROMISES, WE MAY  
EMBRACE AND FOREVER  
HOLD FAST TO THE HOPE OF  
ETERNAL LIFE, THROUGH  
YOUR SON, JESUS CHRIST  
OUR LORD. AMEN.**

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Liturgical Day: The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Date: January 24, 2010

Sermon Title: A Life of Loving Service

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This morning's Gospel lesson – the story of the very first sermon Jesus preached in his hometown synagogue — this lesson includes a very famous quotation from the prophet Isaiah. In Chapter 61, Isaiah says:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn; (*Isaiah 61:1-2, NRSV*)

This portion of Isaiah was written about 700 years before Christ was born, when Israel and Judah had been destroyed by the Babylonians, and many of Jerusalem's leaders were either killed or carried off into captivity. Some believe that Isaiah himself had been captured and relocated to Babylon.

It was a dark and depressing time for God's people. They had lived for generations with the hope that the promise to Abraham (that they would be a mighty nation, respected by their neighbors and in possession of a great land) would be fulfilled among them. But living in a foreign land, and longing for the home they once knew, they began to wonder if they had believed those promises in vain. Perhaps God didn't have a plan for them. Perhaps they never were going to be a great nation. Perhaps it all was one big misunderstanding.

Into that dark and depressing time, the prophet Isaiah spoke a word of comfort to God's people. Isaiah said that the Spirit of God was on the move, and that God had anointed him to do incredible things: to bring good news to the oppressed; to bind up the brokenhearted, to release the captives, to comfort all who mourn. Through the voice of Isaiah, God spoke to their deepest pains and those who believed were vindicated. Israel did return to its homeland. God's promise was fulfilled. The journey back was not without cost, but it was a joyful one, eventually leading those faithful people back to their home and back to the promises of God.

That's the way it is with God's word. No matter how one feels; no matter what one's experience is; no matter what other painful realities press in and seek to diminish hope, God's word speaks to the deepest pains there are, and it makes a difference.

These words of Isaiah, embraced by Jesus, have much to say to our churches today. That is why many Christian churches offer a variety of ministries to people in need. These days, we immediately think of the relief efforts that are taking place in Haiti. It is easy to think of any number of other efforts as well. Here at Saint Peter, we tend to focus on Selian Lutheran Hospital in Tanzania and the ELCA's World Hunger Appeal. Closer to home, we have been supportive of Habitat for Humanity, and Covenant Cupboard. We support these ministries so that what Jesus envisions in his first sermon might be carried out among us in some



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

visible, concrete ways today. We support these ministries so that what we do together, as a congregation or as a denomination or as the whole body of Christ throughout the world, might live into this vision, from the first sermon our Lord preached. A ministry that is grounded in the wisdom of the Prophet Isaiah, and given new life through the words and actions of Jesus.

This morning's Gospel lesson charges each one of us with the responsibility of seeing that everything we do at Saint Peter is done so that the world might experience the sustenance, release, sight, and freedom that comes from the Gospel. To that end, Jesus teaches us that our ministry cannot be just for us. Our Sunday School cannot be just for us. Our Worship cannot be just for us. Our facilities cannot be just for us. Our fellowship events cannot be just for us. If any of these are done just for the sake of those who call themselves Saint Peter Lutheran Church, then our ministry is pointed in exactly the wrong direction: towards us instead of towards others. Both Jesus and Isaiah call us outside of ourselves, and charge us with the responsibility of sharing God's good news with others.

That's why I like the second half of our new mission statement so much. I hope you've got it memorized by now. It follows from the first half of the mission statement. You'll remember it:

**We are welcomed into God's love; just as we are.**

Through our baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, each one of us is welcomed into the love of God. We are forgiven, renewed, and promised the gift of God's eternity. We don't have to earn it or deserve it. It comes to us as a gift because of what Jesus has accomplished on our behalf. But it doesn't end there. Christian faith is not just a personal one-on-one relationship between a believer and God. It is a relationship with God that sets believers free from worrying about their own salvation, so they can be freed to reach out in love to the world that surrounds us. That is why our mission statement continues with these words:

**We are sent into God's world, to be a reflection of Christ's love.**

We are sent into the world, as representatives of Jesus. Jesus, who in his first sermon, declares that his ministry will be all about bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to the captives, giving sight to the blind and letting the oppressed go free. Any ministry that doesn't take these concerns seriously is not Christian ministry. Any church that does not have a heart for these concerns is not a Christian church.

Sadly, there are many people in our world today who have developed some very negative impressions of Christianity. Some see us as hypocritical – professing to believe in Jesus, but living as though we only believe in ourselves. Some see us as judgmental – eager to point out the sins of others, but reluctant to take our own sin seriously. Some see us as disingenuous – only feigning interest in others, in the hopes that we might convince them to convert to Christianity. Honestly, I don't blame them. The public face of Christianity has often supported these impressions. But this makes it even more important for us to reach out into the world in way that shows how we truly care. Not in order to get something out of serving others. But in order that they might realize how we love them, and perhaps even come to realize how the love we share with them is the love we have first received from God.

That's why I have been so proud of our High School youth these past years. While some churches are organizing backpacking trips in the mountains, and weekends at Disneyland, and beach retreats at the ocean, the primary annual event for most of Saint Peter's active Middle Schoolers and High Schoolers has been a week-long summer service trip. They've been to Juarez, Mexico. They've been to Indian Reservations in Arizona and Montana. They've been to Vancouver, BC. And this year, some of them are going to Puerto Rico. Some of these trips have been hard-labor service events, where the kids have done back-breaking work to help people in need. Some of them have been opportunities to witness the service efforts of others, and to be inspired by them. Some of them have been to economically depressed areas, and others have been to more comfortable surroundings. But every one of them has been a chance for our young people to take a journey together, to bond with one another and their adult guides, and to envision what it means to live a life in which they are sent into God's word to be a reflection of Christ's love. It is inspiring for me to think of how many of these young people will carry this attitude through the rest of their lives, continuing to reach out and make a difference wherever they are, and whenever they get the chance.

Perhaps they will witness to the rest of us as well, and remind us of the life to which Isaiah and Jesus call us; a life in which we make a difference for those who are in need; a life in which we share with others

the love that God has first shared with us. This is the kind of life that can become convincing proof to those who are otherwise predisposed to think of Christians as hypocritical or judgmental or disingenuous. Perhaps they will see, instead, in us, the reflection of Christ's love, as we reach out to be God's good news to them.

Bring good news to the poor. Proclaim release to the captives. Give sight to the blind. Let the oppressed go free. Proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. That is what the ministry of Jesus is all about. What will our ministry be all about? What will your ministry be all about?

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor

English Text: <sup>i</sup>

<sup>4:14</sup> Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup> He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. <sup>16</sup> When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: <sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." <sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." <sup>ii</sup>

Greek Text:

<sup>14</sup> Καὶ ὑπέστρεψεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ πνεύματος εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν. καὶ φήμη ἐξῆλθεν καθ' ὅλης τῆς περιχώρου περὶ αὐτοῦ. <sup>15</sup> καὶ αὐτὸς ἐδίδασκεν ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν δοξαζόμενος ὑπὸ πάντων. <sup>16</sup> Καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς Ναζαρά, οὗ ἦν τεθραμμένος, καὶ εἰσήλθεν κατὰ τὸ εἰθὸς αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν σαββάτων εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν καὶ ἀνέστη ἀναγνῶναι. <sup>17</sup> καὶ ἐπέδοθη αὐτῷ βιβλίον τοῦ προφήτου Ἡσαΐου καὶ ἀναπτύξας τὸ βιβλίον εὗρεν τὸν τόπον οὗ ἦν γεγραμμένον. <sup>18</sup> πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ' ἐμὲ οὗ εἶνεκεν ἔχρισεν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς, ἀπέσταλκεν με, κηρύξαι αἰχμαλώτοις ἄφεσιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν, ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει, <sup>19</sup> κηρύξαι ἐν αὐτῷ κυρίου δεκτόν. <sup>20</sup> καὶ πτύξας τὸ βιβλίον ἀποδοὺς τῷ ὑπηρέτῃ ἐκάθισεν. καὶ πάντων οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ ἦσαν ἀτενίζοντες αὐτῷ. <sup>21</sup> ἤρξατο δὲ λέγειν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ὅτι σήμερον πεπλήρωται ἡ γραφὴ αὕτη ἐν τοῖς ὠσὶν ὑμῶν. <sup>iii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at [www.elca.org/worship/church\\_year](http://www.elca.org/worship/church_year).

<sup>ii</sup> St. Luke 4:14-21, *New Revised Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

<sup>iii</sup> St. Luke 4:14-21, *The Greek New Testament*, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).