

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
January 31, 2016
St. Luke 4:21-30
Our Master Often Meets with Unbelief
Rev. George Ferch

I mentioned to the Bible study group at Carmel Senior Living last Thursday how disappointing it is when I tell someone about Christ and the saving work he did for them on the cross, and instead of believing in Jesus, they continue to reject him and his redemption. They may even become furious at the suggestion that Jesus is the only Promised Savior.

Anger is the reaction Jesus' hearers had against him after he read Isaiah in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth in Galilee. It is true now as it was true then that **Our Savior Often Meets with Unbelief** when he claims he is the Messiah, the Christ. Still, we continue to use God's Word to win some. And, we do not have to blame ourselves when some reject his Word.

After his baptism, Jesus travelled north, back to the place where he had grown up. Nazareth was a tiny village where people knew everyone. It was an honor to have a hometown boy stand and read from the scroll of Isaiah on the Sabbath. "The Spirit of the LORD is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." [4:18]

Why had Jesus come home? He had come to reveal that he is the one Isaiah had written about. Jesus had great love for his neighbors. God's Son, Mary and Joseph's son, wanted his friends to be among the first to believe in him and be saved from poverty, to receive freedom and release from oppression, and to recover their sight; all in a spiritual sense, of course.

After Jesus read and sat down, "the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him." Then they heard him say, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." This was not quite what they had expected. Yes, the local boy had done a fine job. They spoke well of him. However, they were amazed that Jesus applied Isaiah's gracious words to himself. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked."

Their implication is evident. Jesus could not be the Messiah. We know him. He grew up around here. It is a bit like our church body not generally assigning a new pastor to his home congregation because the people know him. Jesus was certainly a good man. They remembered Jesus as a good boy growing up. But the Messiah? No.

Jesus preached God's Word. When he did, our Savior often meets with unbelief. He met that unbelief right there in his home synagogue. Jesus still meets unbelief when he speaks God's Word through us. This unbelief did not stop Jesus from sticking with the Word of God. It does not deter us. We continue to use God's Word to win some. The message of Jesus' cross and empty tomb are the power that wins souls for him.

Our Savior often meets with unbelief. People reject the real Jesus and instead create and follow a pretend Jesus who is only a good man, a great example, a prophet, and a wise teacher. The temptation is to try and find a way to present the gospel so that everyone always will believe that Jesus is true God and the Savior from sin. This is not possible because our Savior often meets with unbelief. Like Jesus, we preach the Word, read the Scriptures, and hold Jesus out as the only Christ. We declare that in Jesus Christ all the Bible's promises have come to pass. "Today the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

As we continue to use God's Word we will win some but not all. We servants are not greater than our Master. Jesus said that people will reject the One who sent him. They will reject him.

They will reject us who speak on his behalf. Our Savior often meets with unbelief when through us he identifies himself as the Savior.

Rather than give up on God's Word because it does not win all, we will continue to preach the Word because it will continue to win some. We do not have to blame ourselves when some reject his Word.

Our Lord knew their thoughts. He knew they would demand him to "prove himself" by doing miracles like he had done in Capernaum. Jesus quoted a familiar proverb, "Physician, heal yourself." That proverb means if I am to believe a physician can heal me, I want to see him first heal himself and then I'll believe. That would not work in this case. Jesus knew they would not believe if he were to do that.

Those in the synagogue rejected Jesus' claim because they did not believe this man they knew could be the Messiah. In their unbelief, they were typical of their unbelieving ancestors. Those ancestors had rejected Elijah and Elisha as God's prophets among them, so God had sent those prophets to the Gentiles. Jesus knew that even if he did repeat some miracles, "No prophet is accepted in his hometown."

Jesus was not to blame for the anger and hatred the people who heard those words had against Jesus. They bore full responsibility and blame. They attempted to throw Jesus down a cliff. However, that was not the place, nor the time, nor the manner for Jesus' death. He would control those and offer up his life on the cross for the world's sins when it was his time.

We do not have to blame ourselves when some reject his Word. That does not mean it does not bother us, or that we should not always seek good ways to get the Word of God out to people. However, if they do not accept it, it is their responsibility and blame. Paul said to the elders in Ephesus, "I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God." [Acts 20:26, 27]

Our Savior often meets with unbelief. Remember how often that happened in the Old Testament to prophets like Elijah and Elisha. Remember how often it happened to Jesus during his ministry. It happened to me and to my former congregations. It has happened and will happen again here.

What are we to do? We will continue to point to Jesus Christ in whom today the scripture has been fulfilled. We will continue to preach God's Word. We will continue to care about lost souls and sacrifice ourselves and our resources to carry out the ministry of reconciliation. Be sure of this. That ministry will continue to win some. Amen. <SDG>