

Jesus is Your Unexpected Savior!

Jesus keeps surprising us. Who would have guessed that the sky would split, that the Father would speak and the Holy Spirit would descend as a dove when Jesus was baptized? Or who would have guessed that without even saying anything, Jesus would make over a 100 gallons of fine wine from water at the Wedding of Cana. This morning, we get another story of Jesus revealing himself as true God.

Unexpected to be Revealed as true God

Jesus spent some time in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee and even performed some miracles there. His reputation was spreading. Then he went to his hometown of Nazareth. I like to imagine him introducing his disciples to his mother as they all found places to sleep. On the Sabbath day, he went to the synagogue, as he normally did. As a popular rabbi and a hometown hero, it's not surprising that Jesus was invited to read the Scripture lesson. It was the custom to stand when reading the Scriptures and then to sit down while teaching.

Jesus read from Isaiah 61, which is about the promised Messiah. “**The Spirit of the Lord is on me** [that happened when Jesus was baptized], **because he has anointed me** [When he was baptized, he was specially chosen to be the Savior.] **to proclaim good news to the poor** [The poor are the spiritually poor, those who realize that they are sinners in need of salvation. Jesus would proclaim good news to them that their sins were forgiven and they would live forever in heaven]. **He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners** [The prisoners are those who are trapped in their sins. Jesus would proclaim salvation to them.] **and recovery of sight for the blind** [The blind are those who can not see, that is believe, their Savior. Jesus would give them sight to see, to believe, in him], **to set the oppressed free**, [Those who are oppressed because of their sins would be set free.] ¹⁹ **to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.**” [Jesus would announce the good news of God's love and salvation.]

Every Jew in that synagogue knew that those verses from Isaiah 61 referred to the promised Messiah. After he read the passages, Jesus sat down as if he was going to teach them. Everyone was staring at Jesus. What was he going to say about those verses? Luke tells us that everyone

in the synagogue was staring at him. Then Jesus said (:21), “**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**” In other words, Jesus claimed to be the promised Messiah. I can only imagine how everyone's jaw dropped open. They had all seen Jesus grow up in Nazareth. He did not perform any miracles. He looked extraordinarily ordinary. He was a lowly fellow with no glitz and glamor. It was unexpected that he would reveal himself as true God, the promised Messiah.

Jesus still appears to us in a humble way. When I read a Scripture reading, the heavens do not part and angels do not sing. When someone is baptized, all you hear are a few splashes of water. You don't see the Holy Spirit descending as a dove or hear the Father speak. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, there is not a blast of lighting as I say, “This is my body. This is my blood.” Because there is no special magic or dazzling display of wonder, it's easy to yawn and complain that we get the same boring thing week after week. There are plenty of times that just go through the motions of worship, times that we do not concentrate on the hymns or scripture lessons. Our minds easily wander, especially during the sermon (or at least mind does). We often sing the songs of the liturgy without any meaning. We prattle off the Lord's Prayer without thinking about what each phrase means.

The routine of worship may not always seem exciting to us, but the message of salvation is clearly proclaimed here just as it was in Nazareth. The same message of salvation that Jesus read from Isaiah 61, is the same message of forgiveness and eternal life that we have. We are the poor who hear good news, the prisoners who have been freed, the blind who have had our sight restored, the oppressed who have been set free. All of us are infected with sin from the moment of our conception. We sin every day. Which of us can review our day and not think of anything we did wrong? We need forgiveness every day, forgiveness that we can not earn by ourselves. Since we can not earn our own forgiveness, Jesus won it for us through his perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection. You are already saved. That is the heart and core of our worship. That is what gives us joy and gladness. It is here that Jesus is revealed to us as Lord and Savior.

Unexpected to be Rejected by many

When Jesus explained that he was the promised Messiah, the people of Nazareth rejected him. They asked each other (:22), “**Isn't this Joseph's son?**” Joseph was a common carpenter. How could his son, Jesus, be God in the flesh? Jesus could tell that the people were rejecting him.

Instead of the good news of salvation, they wanted some fancy miracles. Jesus described their attitude (:23), “**Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself.’**” In other words, the people were saying, “Jesus, you have a problem that you need to take care of before you tell us that we are sinners. Jesus, you are claiming to be true God, the Savior of the world. You are wrong.”

In the synagogue, Jesus simply read some Bible verses. It seemed very bland and boring even though those words were the very message of salvation. The people of Nazareth wanted something flashy and impressive. They wanted Jesus to perform miracles in Nazareth like he had in Capernaum. Jesus explained that a prophet is not accepted in his hometown. If a congregation saw a little boy grow up and become a pastor, they probably would not respect him as a pastor because they would remember him as an immature goofball. Jesus referenced Elijah, the Old Testament prophet. Since the Israelites rejected God, the Lord sent Elijah to a Gentile widow instead of to the Israelites. Jesus made the point clearer by referencing another Old Testament prophet Elisha. Since the Israelites rejected God, the Lord connected Elisha to a Syrian named Naaman, instead of helping the Israelites. Jesus was saying that those who rejected the true God, would be rejected by the true God. Those who rejected Jesus would suffer.

The people of Nazareth got the point Jesus was making that if they rejected him, God would reject them. That got them so angry with Jesus that a mob mentality took over and they tried to murder him. They dragged him out of the synagogue and then out of the city. They took him to a cliff at the edge of the city and planned to push him to his death. The people complained that Jesus should do a miracle like he did in Capernaum. Well, the people finally got the miracle they wanted. Jesus walked right through the crowd. It’s like they couldn’t touch him. Then Jesus simply walked away. It was a miracle.

What’s especially fascinating about this story for me is that, as true God, Jesus knew what was going to happen in Nazareth. He knew that the people were going to reject him and even try to murder him. If he knew that, then why did he go? Here you get some insight into our Savior’s amazing love for all people. He knew they were going to reject him, but he still reached out to them and shared the good news of salvation with them. Jesus cares about every person, including you and me. He made sure to share the gospel with us. The fact that the people of Nazareth rejected Jesus is not proof of failure. Failure would be NOT sharing the

good news of salvation. All we can do is share the message. We can not control how people react to it.

For Christmas last month, we mailed some 2000 postcards to our community. We also advertised digitally. Over 6500 saw our information and nearly 400 people clicked on our special landing page. It sounds impressive. We got the message out. Yet, not one person visited from those postcards and digital ads. It’s a bit frustrating, but we did not fail. Maybe you have tried telling someone about Jesus or inviting them to church, but they rejected you. That’s not failure. This last week, I spoke to a fellow who has tried witnessing to his classmates. He said that some got angry with him, but, again, that is not failure.

I know that many of you have talked to your neighbors or friends about Jesus. Our church, however, is not overflowing with visitors. People do not like to hear that they are sinful and in need of a Savior. God’s Word offends like an unwelcome diagnosis from the doctor. When someone rejects God’s Word, that rejection is proof that God’s Word powerfully cuts straight to the heart of mankind’s biggest problem—sin. God’s Word reminds that we are sinners who need saving. Yet, what causes Jesus’ words to hurt is what gives them power to heal. When we recognize that we are sinners who deserve damnation, then we rejoice to hear the good news of forgiveness and eternal life. That reality of salvation encourages us to receive God’s Word with joy and to proclaim it boldly to others, just like the believers in our second reading today. They had just face rejection and persecution and yet their prayer was not that the Lord stop the persecution, but that he give them strength to share God’s Word boldly. Who would have guessed that a lowly fellow from Nazareth would be the Savior of the world? But he is! We rejoice in him. Jesus is your unexpected Savior. Amen.