

Sunday's Sermon

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

February 2, 2025

The Reverend David E. Fox

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany (Year C) 2025

Luke 4.21-30

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

Today, our Gospel reading picks up with the last verse from last Sunday's Gospel reading. This is done intentionally to call us back to last week's reading of the Gospel. That gives us an idea as to why these people were so amazed with Jesus. They assumed all that good stuff about bringing good news, proclaiming release, giving sight, and freeing the oppressed was all about them. We know they think it is all about them because of their comment in verse 22, "Is not this Joseph's son?" That question was not meant to be a slight, but it was to highlight that Jesus' allegiance is to be to his family and the place where he grew up. Nazareth, that place where Nathanael asked Phillip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1) These folks thought their great debut was about to happen. They had heard about all of the things that Jesus had done in Capernaum, and they just knew he was going to do greater things for them. It was time for them to cash in on their healings, hopes, and fantasies. Ah yes, they were amazed all right. They were amazed at all they had dreamt up that Jesus, the hometown boy, would do for them. But their amazement would quickly fade into something else.

We do like feel-good messages. I suspect that is why televangelists are so popular. Talking about how God is going to reward you. Making Christianity all about what you the individual can benefit from being a follower. We're all guilty. Praying for our team to win. "Lord, help me to win the lottery, I promise I'll tithe – after taxes of course." We place crosses in certain places thinking that evil spirits and burglars will be detoured from entering a faithful follower's house. Honestly, we do want this whole faith life with Jesus to be all about us. It is easy to be amazed when life is going perfect or at least appearing to be perfect. It's easy to follow Jesus when we do it for our own benefit – follow Jesus and I get to heaven, right? The fore-mentioned televangelists might even tell you that following Jesus will get you a nice car and a nice house and cure you of whatever is ailing you. It's easy to be amazed at the idea of Jesus rewarding us. And folks, just to be clear, I'm not saying that God does not bless us. Because we are indeed blessed by God, but it isn't all about us. If you are a follower of Jesus for the benefits, then you are a follower for the wrong reason. Is your amazement with Jesus starting to fade into something else? If so, I'm glad there are no cliffs nearby.

The reason these Nazarenes, and often we ourselves, want to have Jesus around is so that Jesus will do for us as we wish. Brian Stoffregen says, "We would rather have God under our rule than place ourselves under God's rule." Those are the tough words we must digest today. "We would rather have God under our rule than place ourselves under God's rule." That is the law that we are being crushed by—thinking the things we want are what God wants, making God into our image instead of us being the ones formed in God's own image. Jesus is much bigger than what you or

I could even imagine – the same is true for Jesus’ ministry. It really isn’t about us. It is about Jesus working through us for the sake of the world. That should be what excites you – that is where your amazement should come.

The Nazarenes’ amazement turns to rage after Jesus talks about God working through Elijah to provide food to a gentile widow, while others remained hungry; and the story of God working through Elisha as God cured Naaman, a pagan, while still others continued to suffer with leprosy. When Jesus says this, he is clearly telling them he is not there for them. They would rather have Jesus under their rule than place themselves under Jesus’ rule. Yet, Jesus is not going to place himself under the rule of his hometown people. In fact, Jesus isn’t going to place himself under the rule of Christian people. Jesus’ biblical interpretation differs from their biblical interpretation.

It is not what we picture of Jesus that matters. It is what Jesus pictures of us and the world that matters.

The people of Nazareth became enraged. They tried to kill Jesus, but he got away. Jesus’ biblical interpretation differs from their biblical interpretation. Jesus got away, but not for long. In three short years, they’d nail him to the cross; because his way of life was different than what we wanted. We all had our hand in crucifying Jesus. If it hadn’t been in the 1st century, we would have crucified him in the 21st century. Why? Because we struggle with the idea that life isn’t all about me – that faith isn’t all about me – that Jesus’ death on the cross isn’t all about me. But there is something so much better we can do than get enraged over this fact. And that is to let go of our need for control and place ourselves under Jesus’ rule.

It is easier said than done, but this is what God wants of us. God wants us to see that salvation is so much bigger than the people of Gloria Dei getting to go to heaven. The salvation Jesus brings to the world is one that has his followers following under his rule and reaching out to those who are excluded rather than taking care of the needs of our church campuses and pacifying our own membership. In our council meetings and our congregation meetings, we should be focusing on what God would have us be doing, in Jesus’ name, for the sake of the world, rather than taking care of our own wants. Jesus is calling us to be a church that discerns God’s purpose for us. Jesus is calling us to build relationships with both the church and unchurched people outside of these four walls. Jesus is calling us to listen closely for our community’s needs. Jesus is calling us not only to listen to those needs but to also respond to those needs. Jesus is calling us to be a part of something so much bigger than ourselves. Jesus’ salvation knows no bounds. Jesus is calling us to share his salvation through our hands, through our intellect, and through our hearts. Who has time to be enraged with all of this opportunity that Jesus is shining a light on for us to see?

Sisters and brothers, you have heard verse 21, for the past two weeks, where Jesus says, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” The Greek word used for “hear” is actually the word for “ear,” and can be translated literally to say “in your ears.” Jesus would then be saying, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears.” Jesus’ message for you is inside your ears. Jesus’ message is inside of you. It is a message that will not go away. May Jesus’ proclamation, which places us under his rule, to extend His salvation all over the world, not just within four walls of each worship space, be a proclamation that is so powerful that we can’t help but to listen to it – and not only listen but to respond. Let’s turn our inward thoughts and our bouts of rage into striving for justice and peace throughout the world. This Jesus thing is much bigger than us – Let’s come together, work together and together see how big it really is.