Sermon for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany

'And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.'

+INJ+

'And he unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.'

During this season of Epiphany, we note especially carefully those times when Jesus reveals Himself as the Son of God and exclaims His divine mission.

We see that at the start, He already identifies Himself with the Holy Trinity: for the *Spirit* is *upon* Him, the Spirit that is *of the Lord,* the Father Almighty, who Himself has *anointed* Jesus, His *beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased.*

Christ also shows Himself to be the promised savior, for the Hebrew word for 'anoint' is *mashiach*, Messiah. So the prophet reads, *'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has made me Messiah, to proclaim good news to the poor.'*

'And all spoke well of him, and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.'

The people of Nazareth are amazed. They publicly express their pride in believing that the Messiah may be born from one of them. They even cry out, *'Is this not Joseph's son?'* Perhaps this is said in mockery, but seeing that *'they all spoke well of him, and marveled'* it is more likely that they want to know His parentage to know that Jesus is, in fact, a Nazarene; that He is, in fact, one of their kindred; that the savior of Israel was indeed from their own house.

Yet it is not the fate of prophets to be accepted by God's people. Isaiah was sawn in half by the king of Judah. Daniel was executed under the orders of Haman. So it

is that, though the people of Nazareth seem to praise our Lord who is now speaking to them, yet they shall reject Him, even as they rejected the prophets who came before Him.

For our Lord speaks: *'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Physician, heal thyself." And ask, "What we have heard you did in Capernaum, do here in your hometown a well."*

For what the people of Nazareth ask is simple: you do miracles among the gentiles, now do miracles among your own people, upon your own neighbors. But this is not the way the Father has chosen for His Son.

So our Lord retorts, *'Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah. But Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon.' 'And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, save only Naaman the Syrian.'*

Who could bear this saying? What our Lord is implying is hard to swallow. He comes from doing miracles in the land of the gentile unbelievers, and then refuses to perform any signs among His own flesh and blood, His own Israelite people. And how does He defend His actions? That Elijah saved no widow, save the heathen widow of Sidon. That Elisha saved no leper, save the heathen leper of Syria. That neither came to save Israel, but rather to save *them that are far off.* To the *sick who have need of a physician.* To *the lost who have no shepherd.*

And now Christ, too, comes not for hard-hearted Israel, but for the lost among the nations of the earth, for He must be the savior not of Israel alone, but of all mankind.

'When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.'

How could they not be? For this man, Jesus, who claims now to be the Messiah, was to come not to save the gentile nations, but destroy them. For it is written that the savior would give to Israel *'relief from their suffering, and liberation against the cruelty of their oppressors.' 'He shall avenge the blood of his people; for he does not forget the cry of his afflicted.'* He would *'break the arm of the wicked and the evildoer.' 'He would cause the nations to perish from the land.'* He would *'doom the daughters of Babylon to destruction' and 'kill the mighty kings of*

the gentiles.' 'He would dash their children against the rocks.'

But now this man Jesus, who said He has come to *'proclaim goodness to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, set free those who are oppressed'* seeks to do so, and not among God's people, the Jews, but among the heathen? Christ has called the rich poor, and the free captive. He has called the mighty oppressed. They desired revenge, justice. But this is not the way the Father has chosen for His Son.

So *'when they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.'*

'And they rose up and drove him out of town, and brought him to the brow of the hill so that they could throw him down the cliff.' 'But passing through their midst, he went away.'

Our Lord went away, not to avoid death, but to seek out the right death. He, the greater prophet of which Moses spoke, must go to the widow, the gentile nations who have no God to guide them, and betroth Himself to them, making from a widow a Church. He must go to the leper, those corrupted by ignorance and sin, blindness and heresy, and heal them by life of His body, making of those damned to second death these destined for immortal life.

And when He has healed the leprous nations, and married widowed mankind, then He shall die for them, *even death on a cross.* For *'greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'*

He leaves Nazareth not to save His life, but to seek out the right death. Therefore, hear His voice as he parts into the wilderness of Judea, away from His family, away from His people, for to you, His disciples, He speaks simply:

'Follow me.' 'And I will show you a still more excellent way.'

+INJ+

Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Luke 4:16-30.