**Luke 4:16-30 January 23, 2022**

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

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Luke chapter 4 here re-reading these words, “And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’ This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ goes to his hometown and to describe it as we would in our world today he is canceled. To be honest he is more than canceled these people don’t want to just ignore or shun him they want to kill him! Verses 28 and 29 of our Gospel lesson tells us how they react to the second part of his message, “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 on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.” This was more than just blocking someone on social media or firing them from a television show. This was more than being cut from a team or losing a sponsorship deal. This was more than losing a job this was losing a life. And for what? He stood up in front of the worship assembly in Nazareth in the synagogue. Took the scroll as was his custom meaning he did it before and read from the Word of God. He then sits down, which is the indication that he is going to teach them, similar to the experience of hearing a sermon. You hear the Word, and then the leader explains the Word. It’s what’s happening right now. At first they are happy, they are impressed, they are watching him intently, they are listening obviously, and they marveled at his gracious words. A few minutes later they are filled with wrath and driving him to the edge of a cliff. It gives any speaker or preacher such as myself a bit of anxiety about what we say. We don’t want to be canceled. We certainly don’t want to be killed. But we also don’t want to distort what the word of God says. That’s the truth of any preacher, there’s always a bit of an anxiety when it comes to preaching because the stakes are so high. We’re dealing with the Word of God here, this isn’t something insignificant and this isn’t just a speech. We have a greater fear that we won’t be faithful to what God is saying through us, and for Jesus it was simply stating the truth. The truth of the kingdom of God and the citizens of that kingdom. The kingdom was big enough for the Gentiles, and that message was not well received. Yet it needed to be said and preached, and thank God it was, for we Gentiles are part of the kingdom, and those in Nazareth didn’t want to see this day realized. So they canceled the Christ.

The very first place Jesus goes to begin his ministry is his hometown, if you follow the overall context of Luke it goes Baptism, Temptation in the Wilderness, and then the first place he goes in His ministry is his hometown of Nazareth. This would be his supposed home base, in sports this is like playing in your home stadium, on your home court. There’s such a thing as home court or home field advantage, even if we didn’t see it necessarily in the games that took place yesterday in the NFL playoffs. But Jesus is preaching to his family and friends. They know him and the pressure would be off, this would be seen as the onramp of his ministry, the freebie, the easy layup. Read a few verses, say a few words, go back home and sleep in his own bed. I remember vividly being a second year Seminarian going back to my home congregation after finishing Homiletics II and preaching one of my first sermons. Was it a good sermon? Was it a bad sermon? None of them necessarily cared. They were so happy to see me wearing a clerical collar and an alb, standing up in the same pulpit that my Father preached from for so many years. They were happy I was able to put any sentences together. You’re showered with love in your hometown, they show you a respect for your name and your family and that you’re part of their community, at least that’s how it usually is, and to be fair that was their initial response, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” They knew him, they marveled, all was well, until the message was too controversial, the implication of what Jesus was saying in relation to this passage from Isaiah was too much to handle.

The message was intentional and it didn’t shy away from the truth. The good news proclaimed to the poor, the liberty given to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind and the liberty of the oppressed, all of this was speaking not only of sinful Jews but also sinful Gentiles. The examples that Jesus gives of God’s favor working through Elijah and Elisha to the less fortunate Gentiles was not something that the people of Nazareth wanted to talk about. It was the truth, and they knew it, they knew what Jesus was talking about, but they were firmly on their side of belief and didn’t want to see things any other way. If Jesus sought only to keep the peace he wouldn’t have even brought it up, he would have played both sides, when speaking to Jews it’s an emphasis on Jewish authority, when speaking to Gentiles it’s speaking about how the kingdom may also be included for them someday, but always keeping the peace, jumping back and forth, not really solidly on either side, not hot or cold in either direction, just sitting on the fence and saying happy words, not taking a stand, not speaking the truth of what God’s Word says, just basking in the marveling stares of a happy crowd.

It reminds me of what we saw at the last Lions game of the season where a Father was at the game in Detroit between the Lions and the Packers. This man was wearing a one of a kind jersey, maybe you saw it if you watched the broadcast or saw pictures from the game afterwards. He wore a jersey that was both a Lions jersey, and a Packers jersey, because one of his sons played for the Lions and the other for the Packers. Ultimately what the jersey represented was that he was a fan of his sons and would support any team that they were playing, even if they were playing against each other. In the positive sense it’s a way of seeing the love and support he had for his sons and how he wouldn’t take sides against them, but on the negative side, it’s to see that he really didn’t care about either team. He wasn’t a fan of the Lions or the Packers because he was cheering for both. If we do the same in our faith, if we say that we are of the world and of God in the same way, on equal footing, in a sort of appeasement that the world says that sin is alright and that God says that sin is horrific and terrible, and if we sit on the same fence, hoping to appease, hoping to keep the peace so that we aren’t run out of town or that we don’t face the wrath and anger of those who know the truth but don’t want to face it, we are lukewarm Christians. Neither hot, nor cold. Revelation 3:15-16, “I know your deeds; you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were one or the other! So because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” The temptation to remain hidden in what we think or what the Word of God says and just simply keep the crowd in our own lives happy is a failure we all must face. The truth is hard, and when we do overstep accidentally, we are quick to apologize for our own core beliefs. To apologize for the Word of God, when the truth is those who despise the Word must apologize for their own selfishness and disdain for the truth. We’ve talked a lot in our Adult Bible Study on Sundays from Everyone His Witness on the tactics that people have for delaying or rejecting the conversation about their faith. The last few weeks we’ve focused on how to listen to them and understand where they are coming from. The message that we’ve heard from this series is that people when confronted with their own guilt or shame constantly redirect conversations that touch on it because they don’t want to face it. We do the same things in our own lives when we shy away from the truth, when we won’t stand as Christ did for what the Word actually says, even if it means we lose our hometown hero status, even if it means that people will hate us. Even if it means that our friends and our family will be mad at us for speaking the truth.

It should have been a hero’s welcome, but Jesus knew of his rejection, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.” And let us this day thank God that Jesus didn’t just stay in his hometown, as a speaker in the synagogue of Nazareth alone, because then there wouldn’t be a church so many miles away that is still talking about him today. There wouldn’t be a church where you can hear the Word of God read to you every Sunday and where you get to recline in comfort and hear a message about what this Word says to you today and how it applies to your life. But you come to hear the Word of God, not only the words you wish to hear, and if you are convicted from this Word of sins that you have done wrong, if you feel that I am spying on you and looking in your windows and preaching solely and specifically against you, I promise you I am not. I am preaching against my own sins as much as your own. I am preaching words I need to hear. But again, if you are convicted, if the Word pierces through your heart and your soul and you find yourself filled with guilt and shame for what you have done wrong in the sight of God, you’re in the right place. We come here to God’s house not for a pat on the back, but for a place to repent, a place to hear God’s Word, a place to receive His Sacraments, and the beauty of God’s house is that no matter where it is, in whatever part of the world, you know that’s what you’ll find. Whether you are here in Michigan or anywhere else when you walk through those doors you know what you’re going to get. The truth. The Word of God that is a lamp to your feet and a light to your path, the Word that as we saw in our Old Testament lesson moved so many to tears and despair over themselves, but Nehemiah lifted them up with words of encouragement. The church, the house of God, the place we come for fellowship with others in our faith is a place of tears and sadness over sin, but also rejoicing and praise for the love of God seen through our forgiveness and the salvation that was won for us Gentiles by Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus bears the name of a city that hates him and wanted to kill him, and it shows what he would suffer for you, to save you from your sin, and also it shows that for Christ, there was no turning back.

There’s a saying that goes back to 1519 when a Spanish expedition led by Cortez landed in Mexico and Cortez ordered that they burn the boats. There was no going back, this is where they would have to stay and thrive and build and succeed. In our own lives, when we see the example of Christ and at the very beginning of his ministry, being canceled in his hometown, walking through the murderous crowd and knowing he won’t come back, that we can see his example and move forward from our lives of sin. Burn the boats of temptation, leave it all behind, don’t go back to the places that trigger bad behavior or the same actions and activities that lead you to a lukewarm faith or that lead to a complete and total snuffing out of the flame of faith in your heart. Burn the boats that would lead you back to a life of rebellion and instead move forward into the life that Christ has called you to, a life of forgiveness and a life lived knowing the truth. A life in his church, where forgiveness is given freely, where comfort and peace are found, and where you hear the Word of God, read and preached.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.