**Luke 4:31-44 January 30, 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 when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well, for I was sent for this purpose.” And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A Lutheran Church magazine called for suggestions for a slogan that might define the confessional position of the Lutheran church. The slogan selected was, “A Changeless Christ in a Changing World.” The church not changing and sticking to their timeless ways has been vehemently attacked in our world today. The church may be seen as stubborn to change their own ways or indifferent to how people’s tastes have changed. But we hold that the Savior of the world does and must stand as the eternal Rock of Ages in the midst of the rapid mutations of an ever active world. Now we on the other hand, we adapt and change based on the circumstances of our lives and our world, but Christ remains the same. “A Changeless Christ.” Scripturally we understand this truth from Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” Last week the circumstances in Christ’s life were familiar faces and a familiar setting. In His hometown he got up to speak to a crowd who marveled at his authority and wisdom, only to soon throw him out and seek to put him to death. This week the circumstances have changed, he’s not in Nazareth he goes to Capernaum. Later he goes to Peter’s mother-in-law’s house, and after that to a desolate place, undefined, the kind of spot that no one would go unless they had a good reason. But to compare the first of these scenes to last week, it’s really quite remarkable how similar they are, and these passages come right next to each other in the Gospel of Luke giving us the impression that in the ministry of Christ they are chronological. In Nazareth he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath and read from the scroll, reclined, and taught them. In Capernaum he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath, and Luke records he was teaching them, it’s not a stretch to say he followed the same routine as before. The people are astonished and marvel at Christ in both instances. Jesus remains the same, but the circumstances change. In Nazareth the crowds become angry and full of wrath at his teaching, here in Capernaum he’s faced with a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon. Jesus doesn’t back down from either challenge. He remains the same. He doesn’t back down from the wrath that he knows he’ll face from the angry crowd of well known friends and family in Nazareth, and he doesn’t back down from this spirit of an unclean demon. His authority over both is exercised in how he stands up for the adoption of the Gentiles as God’s own children, and how he stands up against Satan’s servant and casts out the spirit before he can bring Jesus’ ministry to an end prematurely. Jesus shows his power and authority and that doesn’t change.

The remarkable comparison is found at the end of our readings for this week, where after journeying to a desolate place the crowds catch up to Jesus. Last week the crowds drove him out to kill him, here the crowds go out of their way to find him after he’s been gone and we get the impression they would have done anything for him to stay. “They sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them.” The circumstances have drastically changed. Before the people were so enraged they drove him out of their community. Now these people want to build the community around him and keep him from ever leaving. And what is Christ’s response? It’s the same either way. When faced with wrath and anger to kill him, the mission of why he came and the importance of his ministry was put before anything. If we really think about it if he had died that day in Nazareth, it would have been such an easy end to the life of Christ. He would be back in heaven in eternal bliss, he would be free from the struggles and suffering that comes from taking on human flesh, the suffering of thirst, hunger, being tired, being tempted, feeling any kind of pain whether it be physical from being pushed out of a city or emotional like being rejected by those you grew up with and that you love. The easiest part would be that he wouldn’t have had to face the suffering of the cross. But the mission of why he came was too important, and it wasn’t his time. He leaves them. Now in a desolate place he’s met with admiration and support, a group of people who could have made his life so easy here on Earth, who probably would have laid down their lives rather than see Jesus killed and crucified. Who would have attended to him, built him a house, brought him food, he’d live the easy life. And Jesus…leaves them in the same way. He journeys on. “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” The circumstances change, the people change, the places change, but our unchanging God journeys on, the kingdom was big enough for Nazareth, for Capernaum, for Judea, and beyond, and there was work still to be done, the greatest of which would be done in Jerusalem for the sins of all people of all time when he faces the pain that was predestined and he willingly gives up his life on the cross.

That’s the example we get from Jesus Christ, a man who faced down unclean spirits, who healed diseases great and small, although a fever would still be an indication of a greater problem for Peter’s mother-in-law. But still he heals her, restores her, and she’s prepared again to serve. A man who even seeking a few private moments cared for those who sought him out. The circumstances changed, but he remained faithful and focused on the mission and ministry that he came to do.

How different are we when it comes to our work, to our mission, to our service, and to our attitudes when we are faced with changing circumstances. We are chameleons of sin in our lives, and rather than standing on the Rock of Ages, the firm foundation and taking on what the world has to give, we are like boxers who dip and duck and move and avoid. Our morality adapts to our circumstances. When things are good we find it easy to be good and follow the Laws that God has given us, to be generous when blessed with an overabundance, to adapt to the good that’s going on. When things are bad we find it easy to be bad and disregard the Laws that God has given us, to be isolated from the needs of others when we face our own problems, and to adapt to what’s going on in the opposite direction. If prosperity is the only circumstance that will bring out your faith, then your faith is doomed to fail. If your faith hangs on the good life that God has given you, your health, your wealth, your family, everything going right, the perfect recipe of a perfect mood and a perfect day, and a perfect life causing you to come to God’s house and everything having to be perfect for you to worship Him, then your faith is again, doomed to fail. Life isn’t perfect, circumstances don’t stay the same, sin is the destruction of the same circumstance. Sin brings disease, anger, wrath, struggles and problems. Sin brings change, and your unchanging Lord has said that you are His, that He has died for you to save you, but yet you doubt, you worry, you grow anxious about your salvation, you doubt his promises and you give in to the struggles to change to fit the world around you. The example of our Lord as you heard at the beginning was, “A Changeless Christ in a Changing World.” How far we fall from that standard. We are the changing ones, we are the ones who one day shower Jesus with praise, but the next 6 days are full of wrath, anger, or worse even that that, indifference. Our lives aren’t built on the foundation of our unchanging God of love, but instead it changes to fit the circumstances of a changing world. We go with the flow. We do us. We care about what we are told to care about, we follow the fads. We see how different we are and how far we’ve strayed and how different we’ve become.

Two different circumstances, and yet Christ remains focused on His mission. That’s how much he loves you, because without His journey to the cross there would be no salvation, no hope, and no change to the circumstance that we all faced who are born into this world of sin. There would be no change from the destruction that we face on account of our wrongs if it wasn’t for Christ’s continuous mission and ministry in moving toward Jerusalem and the cross where he sacrificed his life, for you. That’s what makes the love that Paul talks about so much greater than anything we could show to each other. Our love changes based on circumstance, watch any romantic comedy and you see that love stories often are messy and like a roller coaster, we sit and wait and hope that they end up together in the end, but the circumstances change, someone lies, or cheats, or gets an opportunity to move somewhere else. But the love that God has for us doesn’t change, it’s constant, it’s patient, it’s kind, it does not envy or boast, it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. The love that God has for you His child bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. That love never ends. While our lives change with the times, His love never ends. His love endures, even when we mess it all up, when we change, when we betray him, and turn our backs on him, even when we curse him and deny him before other people or turn an apathetic gaze toward the needs of others, the service that we’ve been called to, his love doesn’t change, and he forgives us. He loves you, with a greater love than you can ever understand, because Christ laid down His life for you. It’s more than puppy love, a superficial love, to read these words of unspeakable and deep and amazing love to each other speaking about human relationships is a kind gesture, but you’ll soon be disappointed. No lover can live up to this perfect standard of love, human relationships aren’t capable of a love this deep, so it must speak of the love that God has for you, and thanks be to God that you have such a picture to keep your faith grounded on Christ and to see his love so perfectly illustrated, a love that is so great it’s unbelievable. A love that doesn’t change.

I leave you this morning with a quote that speaks of the love of God for you as we ponder the unchanging nature of Christ and the love that Paul speaks about in our Epistle lesson. The quote is, “Love is not a quality that God has but rather the all-embracing totality of what He is.” It’s not that God chooses to love you, it’s that love is the definition of his being. God’s goodness is seen in his love and may that love give you the strength to face a changing world solely focused on the changeless Christ.

Amen.

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

Amen.