

EPIP 3 2010

Luke 4:14-21

Prayer: We thank you O God for the gift of today. We thank you for life and health and the opportunity to come to hear your word and to sing your praise. Help us to seize each day with the assurance of your forgiveness and the confidence of your daily presence. AMEN

You've heard the phrase..."Today is the first day of the rest of your life." This phrase is helpful in that it encourages us to break free from those things which have been holding us back, troubling us, haunting us. It helps us to see that the future is open to us and that today is a new beginning.

Humans alone have the ability to think outside the box of today. We learn from the experiences of the past and plan for the future. This ability is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing because we can imagine a future different than what we are experiencing today. This gives us hope for tomorrow. But the ability to think beyond today also can be a curse, because the memories of yesterday can hold us captive to regrets, to mistakes we have made, the opportunities we have missed, the choices that turned out badly and our fears of tomorrow can steal the joys of today. Because we have this ability to think beyond today we often forget one simple truth. That truth is this, all we really have, is today.

All our yesterdays are gone forever. We are unable to reclaim them. The days of our lives are like sand that has slipped through the hourglass. Once those days are gone they are gone forever. Our grandson, Zephyr likes to quote a line from one of his favorite Veggie Tales movies that goes, "Well, that's 3 minutes of my life that I'll never get back." He's 4 years old. At 4 he is already aware of the passing of time. All our yesterdays are gone and we can access them only by memory. We can do nothing to change yesterday. And tomorrow is just as remote. Tomorrow is yet to come and we can never claim or hold or guarantee tomorrow. All we have for tomorrow is hope. What we do have is TODAY. That's it, TODAY...not yesterday, not tomorrow, Just TODAY. That makes today vitally important, more important than yesterday, more important than tomorrow. This day, TODAY, is your life, you can't have more than today, you can't bank your todays and guarantee more tomorrows. All you have is today.

The text for today says that Jesus was in the synagogue in Nazareth. It was the Sabbath and Jesus took the scroll of the book of Isaiah and he read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." The people of Nazareth would have understood this passage to refer to the coming Messiah. Then Jesus rolled up the scroll and sat down and there follows the first sermon Jesus gave. His words were electric. The first word of the first sermon that Jesus uttered, according to Luke, is the word "Today." He said, "Today, this scripture, has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus was saying that the Messiah had come. Today the world had radically changed. Today the scripture was fulfilled in the very person of Jesus! WOW!

God dwells eternally in the present. Eternity by definition has no past, no future. Eternity is intensely present. So today, Jesus is present with us. God in Christ has come into human flesh and dwells within the limits of time and space that we humans face. Today God walks with us on earth, yet he is still connected to timelessness and eternity.

"Todayness" is the essence of Jesus. He said to the repentant thief on the cross, **"Today you will be with me in paradise."** It was not a wistful hope or an attempt to be kind in a tough situation, no, it was a powerful statement of the Son of God, **"Today you will be with me..."**

Jesus was the one in whom God would fulfill his promises. Jesus picked up the scroll of Isaiah and read, and what he read was a manifesto of his agenda for his work on earth. **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."** How do you think the people of Nazareth heard those words? Vs. 20 says, **"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips."**

In Jesus you are set free. Today you are set free from captivity to sin and death. In the light of Jesus you are no longer blind to the love and mercy of God. The oppression of sin and death is ended. In Jesus the Lord's favor is made known to the world. Today is a day of good news!

To hear a word of forgiveness is a wonderful and liberating thing. And **here in church you hear it every week.** Do you remember hearing it today? At the beginning of the service we have the confession and the absolution follows with these words...

"In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for you and for his sake God forgives you all your sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ he gives the right to become the children of God and promises them everlasting life."

We hear that so often that **the words skip across the surface of our minds like a rock skips across the water.** Those **words are so familiar that they don't sink in and jar us** awake with their power. There is another form of the absolution I'd like you to hear which may have more punch. It goes like this:

"Almighty God, in his mercy, has given his Son to die for you and, for his sake, forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

It is my privilege and my responsibility to proclaim this good news to you. **This is why the church exists,** to proclaim this good news. You do not have to be consumed by

regrets of the past or fears about tomorrow. **Today** God forgives your sins and gives you life and hope.

You are made right with God by the cross of Jesus. **So I declare unto you that TODAY your sins are forgiven** and forgotten. **TODAY you are released** from bondage to the past. **TODAY you are set free.** **TODAY you are freed** from whatever it is that binds and enslaves you. **TODAY you have received the forgiveness of God in Christ.** **TODAY is a new day.** The past is past...let it go. **TODAY is a new day, live it fully.** The forgiveness you have received here in church **TODAY will allow you to face tomorrow with confidence.** God is with you. Trust him to lead and guide you.

Now what about tomorrow? Will these things that God has forgiven return to haunt you? Perhaps they will. **The devil is a master at making you doubt your forgiveness.** The devil is a master at tempting you to return to the slavery of yesterday and whatever it is that appeals to your sinful nature. **But you don't belong to the devil, you belong to God.** In **your baptism** you were named and claimed as a child of God. In your baptism God **promised to forgive you** all your sins, every day of your life. In your baptism God began the work of shaping and molding and forming you into a new person who will take on the image and likeness of his Son Jesus. This **shaping is a process** that lasts a lifetime. And in the process you will never stop sinning. As Martin Luther said, **"I will stop sinning when the shovel beats the dirt on my grave."** But each day between now and then you need to be reassured that God loves you and forgives you. And so if you start to doubt that God really has forgiven you just come back to church next week and I'll tell you again.

When Jesus said, **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to being good news to the poor; to proclaim release to the captives...to let the oppressed go free..."** he was saying that **God will do what you can't do yourself.** God forgives your sins and **set you free** in Jesus. Jesus' words have power and they accomplish what they say. **Today** his word of forgiveness has been fulfilled in your hearing. **Today** is a new day, a new beginning. **Today** you are forgiven, set free. **Today** you have a new clean slate on which to write your life. The past is gone, forgiven and forgotten by God and you are free. So live in your freedom...because **today** is the first day of the rest of your life and your future is secure in the hands of God. AMEN