

Epiphany 3 1/26/25  
Luke 4:16-20 C

“WHAT WE HAVE HEARD YOU DID AT CAPERNAUM, DO HERE IN YOUR HOMETOWN AS WELL.”

Ludvig Nobel was a great businessman, and a man of great character as well. He is credited with single-handedly building Russia's oil industry. He designed the first oil tanker and built better pipelines to get the oil to refineries and then drastically improved the production of those refineries. His workers worked 10 1/2 hour days when other employers demanded 14 hour days of their workers. He fitted his factories with billiard rooms and he even went so far as to share business profits with his employees – an unheard of concept in the 1800's.

When he died in the French city of Cannes in 1888, the world should have mourned the passing of a great man. But, they didn't. Somehow, someone at the newspaper office reached into the file to get Ludvig Nobel's pre-written obituary (it's a common practice of the media, even today, to have obituaries of the famous written while they are still living). But instead, the newspaperman mistakenly grabbed the obituary of Ludwig's younger brother, Alfred.

The next day, the newspaper's headline screamed, “The merchant of death is dead”. You see Ludvig Nobel's younger brother was the inventor of **dynamite** and became wealthy building armaments of war. Alfred Nobel had the rare glimpse to see how he would be remembered. Not wanting to be remembered as the man who became rich by finding ways to kill people faster than ever before, he established the Nobel Prizes, of which the most famous is the Nobel Peace Prize.

Mistaken Identity. The people in Jesus' hometown sure had a mistaken identity when it came to who Jesus was. Look at their words to Him, "What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." What had Jesus done at Capernaum before coming home? The Evangelist Mark tells us that Jesus healed many sick and demon-possessed, even healing one demon-possessed man right in the Synagogue. Jesus had healed Peter's mother-in-law of her deadly fever with just one word. He healed the paralytic man who had been lowered through the roof by his four friends. He "inadvertently" healed the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years when she simply touched the hem of His garment. So great was His power that Jesus even had the ability to raise people from the dead, as was evidenced when He resurrected the daughter of Jairus, the Synagogue leader in Capernaum.

Now, with all this mind, you can begin to understand **why** the hometown crowd in Nazareth was so excited. You can almost see them wringing their hands and licking their chops with greedy anticipation, "Here is the answer to all our problems! We've hit the lottery in Joseph's boy!" Their mindset was that if He did these sorts of miraculous things in Capernaum, imagine what He'll do for us!

But, they didn't get it. They didn't get who Jesus was. So, He reads to them from Isaiah 61:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

The crowd may have been smiling at Jesus' choice. Those words were Messiah words. Jesus said He was coming to give good news to the poor... and what's better news to the poor than the promises of riches and

wealth? He said He was going to give liberty to the captives? That has to mean He's going to free us from Roman rule. Of course, when He gets to power, He's going to need some people to help run the country, and it's only natural that He'd call on us, after all, He's known us forever. He even said that He was going to give sight to the blind. If He does some healing miracles here in Nazareth like He's done in Capernaum, the world is going to beat a path to our door. This Son of Joseph was going to put Nazareth on the map. Their ship was going to come in at last!

But, Jesus gives them a reality check. They were not the objects of God's grace and favor, just because they were from Nazareth. Rather, like Elijah and Elisha who extended God's grace even to Gentiles, Jesus would be the Messiah of all, even the Gentiles, and shower His blessings on all. The people of Nazareth began to question, and they doubted and they concluded this had been a case of mistaken identity – Jesus really wasn't the Messiah He claimed to be because He wasn't the Messiah they wanted. So, they are filled with wrath and try to kill Him.

Truth be told, we too, have a case of mistaken identity when it comes to Jesus. Yes, we acknowledge He's the Messiah, but we would rather have a magic genie-Jesus to grant us our every wish than a Savior from sin, death, and hell.

We only need look to when misery, pain, or sorrow comes. What is your reaction? You take offense at God and plead with God on the basis of your works, "Hey God! I'm a Christian. I'm a good Lutheran! I give my offerings. What's the deal? Why are you blessing that scoundrel and cheat while I suffer? Why is my spouse sick? Why didn't I get the promotion at work? Why is my child in rebellion? It isn't fair! I rubbed the magic lamp, Jesus, **but you didn't appear to grant my every wish.**"

We are as guilty as the people of Nazareth in our blind, selfish behavior. What exactly do you expect apart from Jesus? In the confession of sin, you confess the truth of God's Word, "we justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment." Apart from Jesus, you deserve nothing but eternal death and damnation. You are a sinner and the wages of sin is death – period.

But, because Jesus did come to be the Messiah, you are completely forgiven. Jesus redeemed you from sin, death, and the devil "not with silver or gold, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death." Jesus laid down His life as the ransom payment for your sins.

And, just as Jesus came to Nazareth, He comes to you this very day. In the weakness and doubt of our mortal nature, we may have a case of mistaken identity when it comes to Jesus at times, but Jesus knows who you are. In your baptism, God marked you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. You are His child and heir.

The cross that we bear can indeed become heavy. In this valley of the shadow of death, you will – at one time or another, in one way or another -- face perils and struggles and tribulations in your life. Jesus knows and understands exactly what you are going through, for He, too, endured the cross. Take heart and be of good cheer!

Jesus does not abandon you the minute the going gets tough, and doubt eats away at your faith. In your Baptism, in the hearing and learning of His Word, in the eating and drinking of His Body and Blood Jesus comes to unconditionally with His unconditional gifts of forgiveness, love, kindness, peace, joy.

So, Dear Child of God, do not be mistaken as to Jesus' identity. No matter what this world's multitudes may say, no matter what lies the devil whispers, no matter what the weakness of your doubts may say, this Epiphany season reminds us that Jesus remains the sinless Son of God who came from heaven above to love you. He was born loving you; and He died loving you. And now, even now, He still loves you. So you might be released from the pain within you; so you might be freed from the sin that condemns you, He took your place. Under the law, under the whip, upon the cross, He took your place. He burst open the bonds of death's dark grave and opened heaven to you. His rod and staff do comfort you as you contend for the faith this day. He is the light of the world. He is your one-and-only living Savior.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.