

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
January 24, 2010**

Luke 4:16-30

A Lesson about REJECTION

1. *Learn this lesson for your welfare*
2. *Learn this lesson for your witnessing*

Hymns: 94 (1-4) – 281 – 94 (5)

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Luke 4:16-30 – (Jesus) went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom
for the prisoners and recovery of sight
for the blind, to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.' I tell you the truth," he continued, "No prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when

the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land.

Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed-- only Naaman the Syrian."

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Have you been rejected lately? Maybe you're an Evergreen Lutheran High School student and had your sights set on asking someone out for the Winterfest dance. Maybe you had your speech all planned out and got up your nerve, but the person said, "You have such a nice personality, but I'm going to have to say "No."

Perhaps you've been rejected after applying for a job. You filled out all the right forms and had a great talk with the Human Resources person, but never got a call-back. After a couple weeks you called them yourself, and they let you know that the job was giving to someone else (although you were "second best.")

Perhaps you've even been rejected by family members after you said something that needed to be said. How depressing! Rejection is one of the saddest things that can happen to a person. It's not a pleasant feeling.

Today we learn a lesson about rejection in the Bible. Unfortunately, we see that it is Jesus himself who is rejected. **Let's learn a lesson about rejection and learn it well for two reasons:**

1. **Learn it for your welfare**

2. Learn it for your witnessing

We read, "*(Jesus) went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read.*" Jesus had begun his public ministry not long before this. He had been baptized in the Jordan River to publicly acknowledge his earthly ministry had begun. He had been led into the wilderness by Satan to be tempted. He had performed his first miracle, changing water into wine at a wedding. Now he returns to his hometown to pay a visit. The new prophet / miracle worker had attracted some attention already, and he was even given the privilege of reading the lesson for the Saturday service and delivering the message in Nazareth. (In synagogues in Jesus' day, they would rotate readers, even making use of volunteers)

As Jesus begins, Luke writes: "*The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'* Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, '*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*' "

The text from Isaiah had to do with the "Servant" that the Lord himself had promised to send to mankind to do his work. It prophesied about the Messiah who was to come into the world. To whom would this Messiah come?

- **To those who are "poor"** – Not just the financially poor, but those who have a poor, utterly sinful condition.

We're certainly included in this group, as were the people at Nazareth. The Messiah would have good news for the poor. He would come to pay their way to heaven by his death on the cross. As their Savior, he would give them a home in heaven. They would have spiritual riches!

- **To those who are "prisoners"** – Not those just in physical prisons, but those who are held prisoner by sin and death. We certainly are part of this group also! We are sinners through and through, without excuse. Because of that, we are headed for death and the grave. But the Messiah would bring release for these spiritual prisoners. By his rising from the dead he would break the power of death and give us eternal life in heaven!
- **To those who are "blind"** – Not just the physically blind, but those who do not know God or know the way to heaven. We certainly were among that group, for in our original sinful condition that we were born in, we were God's enemies, as Romans 8 tells us. Even now, we still have times we love sin and seek sin blindly. But the Messiah would bring spiritual enlightenment and understanding through the work of God's Holy Spirit.
- **To those who are "oppressed"** – Not just politically or socially oppressed, but those oppressed by the devil's temptations and accusations, and by their own guilty consciences. We're certainly included in this group also. Our guilt lies heavy on us, and the devil relentlessly comes daily with temptations. But the Messiah would

ease our guilty consciences by his deliverance from sin, and would break the devil's power by his victory on the cross and at the empty tomb.

This was Jesus' "sermon text" for that day long ago, and Luke tells us that he rolled up the scroll, sat down to deliver the message (as was the custom), and the eyes of all were fixed on him. He began to preach a message that had the theme: ***"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*** He was saying, "The Messiah has come. I have arrived. I have come to do God's work, which was prophesied about me in the Old Testament."

The wonderful, sacred scene soon turns ugly. It begins with their first reaction to this message: *"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked."* This might seem like a good reaction at first reading, but the message was not met with faith because of the bringer of the message, who they knew very well as a little boy. "This is that carpenter's son," they remember. "It certainly can't be the One promised by the Lord himself in the Scriptures!"

Jesus has further words for them, quite blunt words. First, he tells them that he knows what's on their mind to ask him: *"Jesus said to them, 'Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"* He tells them he knows they're going to want a sign from him. They're going to want some magic and miracles to impress them, since they've heard he's done them in other places!

Second, he says, *"I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his hometown."* Familiarity is a problem for those who knew

him previously. He basically is telling them, "I should have known you would reject me because I came from here!"

Thirdly, he brings up examples of what God did in past times when his own chosen nation rejected him in the OT. He brings up familiar stories about the prophets Elijah and Elisha. When wicked King Ahab led the nation astray to worship false gods, the Lord sent Elijah to a Gentile widow for food and a place to stay up in Sidon, not to a widow of Israel. And the Lord saw fit to heal a Gentile man through his prophet Elisha, an army commander named Naaman from Syria, although there were plenty of lepers in Israel to heal. Jesus is inferring some honest, yet difficult, lessons for them:

1. God's salvation is for all people, including Gentiles
2. God goes to other people when he is rejected
3. Foreigners believe when you people (God's nation) haven't believed

The reaction of the crowd now is openly hostile:

- "We, unbelievers?!"
- "We, under God's condemnation?!"
- "Gentiles, members of God's family like us?!"
- "And you, a prophet?!"

They rush at him, physically remove him from their synagogue and from the town, and prepare to throw him down the cliff that the town was built on.

REJECTION! But then, since it was not his time, Jesus takes control of the situation and leaves under his own power, and they are powerless to stop him. This scene of rejection reminds us of the verse from John

1: *"He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him"* (John 1:11).

Today, we are to learn lessons from this rejection of Jesus. What can we learn? Our first lesson is for ourselves, for our own faith. **The lesson is: We must take care that we don't reject Christ also.** That may sound like an absurdity in your mind. "Me, reject the Lord?" "Me, reject Christ?" But the warning is well taken by us today.

How might we be tempted to reject Christ? First, a simple way we can be in danger of rejecting Christ's message is if we're not here to hear it. Scripture tells us, *"Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy."* Jesus says in John 8, *"He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."* If we choose to skip church on a given Sunday and not hear what Jesus would have us learn, we have rejected him for another.

It could also happen by our own selective minds. For example, think about buffets for a moment. I love buffets! You can sidle through the line and check out what you'd like to sample. You can pick and choose to your hearts content. Might we be tempted to do the same thing when it comes to Jesus? He has some difficult teachings for his people when it comes to:

- Their sinful condition and their inability to save themselves
- How unbelievers will perish in hell without Christ
- How God created the world and did not use a process of evolution over millions of years to bring life about

- Roles of men and women in marriage and in the church
- And many more

Jesus also says, *"Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you."* Might we be tempted to accept what we want to accept, in a buffet style manner and reject the rest?

Thirdly, over time we might be tempted to cool off in our faith and our walk with God. I remember a young man well that might serve as an example. I saw him grow up through high school and mature into a young man. He was truly a young friend of mine. He went to the church's grade school, and had a knowledge of the Bible that would win any trivia game at the kitchen table! He went to the area Lutheran high school. His grandpa was a WELS pastor. His father was the congregational president. All through high school he was active in Youth Group at the Bible studies and recreational events. And he was really a personable guy I could always share a laugh with. He almost went to MLC to study to be a pastor, but for some reason it didn't work out at the time.

I remember that after he graduated and got a job, things changed. From what I remember, he had friends that didn't have the greatest influence on him. He hit some tough financial times that caused him to have to work many hours to scratch by, and he came to worship less and less. He wasn't the most reliable person in picking up the phone or returning a phone call or meeting you at a certain time, so it was difficult for me to contact him. I did know that his parents were dealing with him as best they could with counsel from God's Word. He moved around the area quite a bit and eventually was not coming to God's house at all. Soon I heard that he had moved in

with his girlfriend and they were living in sin. I remember wondering how things ever got that way. He was one that I never would have guessed would waver and fall away like he did. I've taken it as a warning that no matter a person's background or training, the devil can gain a foothold. I take great comfort that God turned his life around and this young man now has a wife and family, and has been back to God's house! May we never say this couldn't happen to us as well.

May God keep us strong in the faith as we see this sad example of Jesus' own hometown rejecting him.

We see a second lesson from this sad account today. We learn this lesson because we are like Christ in the world. Jesus told his disciples in John 20, "*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" What may happen to us when we speak the truth faithfully?

We see this lesson clearly in other accounts from Jesus' life:

- Luke 8 – Jesus' ministry took him across the Jordan River, where he healed a demon possessed man by sending his evil spirit into a herd of pigs. The pigs subsequently ran down a steep hill into the lake and drowned, as the evil spirit possessed them. We then hear: "*All the people of the region... asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.*"
- John 6 – Jesus has a very direct sermon to preach to the people. He tells them in an illustration that he is the Bread of Life from heaven and that whoever wants to have a part in God's Kingdom must "consume" him, using the picture of "eating his flesh" with the Bread of Life picture.

We then read in John 6: "*From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.*"

- John 5 – Jesus addresses some of the religious leaders of his day that have opposed him. He wants them to know where he has come from and why: "*Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.' For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*"

Do you see the second lesson for us? It is for our life of witnessing. **Rejection may come.** We might look for what we think is the right time and opportunity to share our faith with a friend or relative. We might be excited about how we think the conversation went. And then... The message is rejected. Or perhaps we are the only one in our extended family that is a Bible-believing Christian, and our family is even a bit hostile to us when we want to talk about our faith.

We must not be surprised at this, for in our account today we see that Jesus himself was rejected by those he came to. Ultimately, we see how God used the rejection of his Son by the religious leaders of Jesus' day to fulfill the salvation of the world, as he was put to death on the cross.

When your witness has been rejected, remember these three things:

1. Don't take it personally. It really is not you who is being rejected. Jesus once said, "*He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.*" (Luke 10:16)

2. Remember they will have to answer to a bigger authority than you. This will turn your feelings of frustration, anger, or even shame (if they've ridiculed you) into feeling sorry for the person feeling that way and even the feeling of trying again despite rejection.
3. That leads to the third thought to remember: Keep trying! Don't quit speaking about your faith, even to someone who has rejected you already. God in his time can work miracles through his Word and your witness. After all, there probably are people here today who have stories about how someone they never would have guessed would believe in the Lord Jesus came to faith in him and are now living their Christian faith!

REJECTION! Not pleasant at all. Although it is not the happiest story we could read today, valuable lessons are found in it. **May we learn two important lessons today:**

- 1. Learn this important lesson for your own welfare**
- 2. Learn this important lesson for your witnessing**

Finally, may God keep us close to him as he continues to give us the strength to stay strong in the faith, and may he give us the words to say as his witnesses. Amen.