

What is Jesus Asking Us to Do

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[0 : 00] which is in the series that we're doing on these Sunday evenings, is the Gospel according to St. Luke, and it's the fourth chapter, beginning at the 14th verse.

I preached the first sermon of my life 42 years ago, so I've been doing this a long time, and I tell you that because the curse that afflicts me most now is that I've heard all this before, and I feel the weight of it sometimes when you come to a very familiar passage like the one we are to deal with tonight.

But then I want to tell you that the necessity and discipline of standing up to preach to you tonight forces me to go at the passage again, even though the terrible familiarity makes me think, I've heard all this before.

And at once you have, I mean in my experience, once you have taken it upon yourself to look at it anew and afresh, it's not long before you wonder if you've ever read it before, and ever seen what is there.

And so my prayer for you tonight is that you will read it as you have never read it before, and you will hear and experience through this Word of God something of the present reality of God.

[1 : 31] I think one of the trouble that Jesus had with his contemporaries was that they read the Bible. You know, I'm often told that we have this lady on Thursday morning at breakfast where you get full breakfast at 7 o'clock and you're all welcome to come.

That's part of the advertisement in the bulletin this week, so I pass it on to you. And she's always saying, well, you know so much, Harry. And I have to say yes, I guess you're right.

But I'm lying through my teeth. I don't know that much. But I think the idea is that there is a secret here that the professional clergyman can see and that other people can't.

And that because, you know, you examine it carefully, almost like a scientist who puts a specimen under a microscope and examines it carefully, you can see things there that other people can't.

And you dissect it and work at it, and you can see things that others can't see. And it's a bit helpful to one's pride if people think you're that wise.

[2 : 43] But they are deceived. Because the purpose of the Word of God, as you have it in front of you tonight, preferably on your lap and open at page 58, is that through the Scriptures you encounter the person of Jesus Christ.

You don't discover secret meanings or hidden things. You discover the person of Jesus Christ. That's what it's for. And you can use all the faculty of mind and imagination and emotion and everything else.

And God can use all that by the Holy Spirit to bring you face-to-face with Jesus Christ. Now this is an interesting passage tonight because in it Jesus is preaching a sermon.

And if you want to learn from him how to preach a sermon, then look at this passage because it will tell you a great deal about how that works.

How the peculiar communication takes place which is at the heart of Christian faith. the communication where a believer by faith through the word encounters the person of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 03] It's very important that you understand that because it's not like the Encyclopedia of Britannica where you don't encounter anybody.

You encounter knowledge and that may be very edifying and very helpful. In fact, no doubt is. but this is different because the purpose of this word of God is that you are to encounter the person of God.

And so the passage begins with Jesus returning to Nazareth where he had been brought up. And he went to the synagogue as his custom was on the Sabbath day.

And I reminded the confirmation class this morning which meets every Sunday morning at 9 o'clock and you'd be welcome. That's the commercial number two. I reminded them this morning that the earliest record of Jewish synagogue worship is in the New Testament.

I think that's a delightful little anomaly but I pass it on to you for what it's worth. Here they were in the synagogue in Nazareth and to get to Nazareth I know because we were there two years ago you take a bus and it winds up and up and up and it's very very steep and you get right up almost as it seems on the top of a hill and there is this city set on a hill and it's not that big a city but it's there it is.

[5 : 36] Well, Jesus was there he was in the synagogue he was teaching it was the Sabbath day and the the pattern of it all was that the scriptures were passed to him.

The first reading we used to have a first lesson and a second lesson we now have two or three lessons in our new book of alternative services but the synagogues had two one from the law and one from the prophets and apparently the lesson from the law had been read and so the scroll of the prophet was given to Jesus and he opened it at Isaiah chapter 60 and people wonder whether he was preaching according to the lectionary of the day the lectionary is the thing that you find in the front of the prayer book which tells you what lesson is read on what Sunday whether he was speaking according to the lectionary of the day or whether he chose the passage himself but he was given the scroll he opened it and he read and I'd like you to read it with me just so you get it thoroughly into your mind verse 18 of chapter 4 together the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down do you know why a cathedral is called a cathedral this is another bit of wonderful information that will edify you for the rest of your life it's called a cathedral because that's where the bishop sits down it's his the bishop's seat and this was the seat from which the bishop was to teach and so that in the synagogue the preacher sat down and Jesus sat down and you get the fact that there was wonderful attention paid to him when they when you read in the in the story the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on it he had their attention so he sat down and they all looked at him and of course they knew who he was as comes out later in the story the eyes of all were fixed on him and he said today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing well that's the first great principle of scripture what it says it does what it says it is

God's word is not like our words that just float off into the ether so to speak the endless number of them God's word becomes a reality God's word is the reality heaven and earth shall pass away but my word shall not pass away this is the substantial reality by which we live which is the word of God and Jesus tells them as he reads this passage this word has substantial reality right here and right now this word has been fulfilled this word which was spoken long ago is fulfilled now so Jesus tells them well then what happens is the response to this a sort of a quick survey of the congregation and you find that the congregation are thinking well of the preacher all spoke well of him wondered at the words of grace that came from his mouth it was it was great communication was happening and uh then they said he's not this

Joseph's son and I suspect it means there's something wrong here he shouldn't be able to speak like this well Jesus responds immediately to the congregation and he says and listen to him it's him that says all this according to St. Luke doubtless you will quote to me this proverb physician heal thyself what we have heard you did at Capernaum do here also in your own country so he puts words into the mouth of the congregation he sees them and he their eyes are fixed on him but also what's going on in their minds is revealed to him too I don't think that's particularly miraculous I just think it was that

Christ knew men and knew what was in their hearts Luke has already told us he knew what was in their hearts he told them that that's what was in their hearts that we want to see some of the works you did at Capernaum we want to see them done here so the sermon goes on and he says I want to tell you the truth face this reality now in facing this reality there were two stories by which he was going to bring them to this reality if you have ever been a Sunday school teacher you'll know that these are two lovely stories that it's lovely to tell children the story of the widow of Zarephath who when Elijah came to her and said I am the prophet get me something to eat and she was out picking up a few sticks from the ground because she had a little meal and a little oil and she was going to cook it to feed her son and herself before the devastating onslaught of famine took over

and she and her son would die and the prophet said to her first give some to me you may not think that's a very prophetic behavior but that's what he did and she did and you will know the wonderful story that while the famine lasted her little cruise of oil and her little bit of grain never faded and it provided for her through all the days of that famine they said oh yeah that's a lovely story [12:58] I've known that story all my life I really love that story great story he went on and he said and you know the story of Naaman the Syrian the great general in the Syrian army powerful loved and respected by his master the king of Syria and yet there was on him that first telltale sign of leprosy the consequences of that were dreaded we all now in our day look for the telltale signs of disease in which we read our faith I find one about every week in my life I don't know how often you find them in your but this is the end I know it's over now but this was for real with Naaman he had this dreaded affliction and it was a household girl servant in the house that said

I would you were in Israel the commentators this is the lovely part of it you know is that nobody had ever heard of this happening in Israel but this girl who was a captive in a way in a foreign country working for some foreign people said back home they'd be able to handle that and how she knew that nobody knows but she did and so the kings wrote letters and a kind of king's ransom was gathered and the great general with all his panoply of guards around him went down into Israel and the king of Israel was frightened out of his mind and but by a wonderful series of things which Chris has already read to you he was wonderfully healed they said ah yeah we love that story love that story great story and then Jesus put in the knife and said there were lots of people starving in Israel and none of them were fed there were lots of lepers in

Israel and none of them were healed and the mood of the congregation suddenly changed because that story which they had been familiar with all their lives was suddenly turned on them and they were terribly convicted by it that's why the Bible is very dangerous I told somebody I don't know who it was about the wonderful picture of I guess I told the Wednesday noon Bible study about the wonderful picture of that Soren Kierkegaard illustrates of how what we really should do is we should take the Bible and we should all go up onto the top of a high mountain and we should take the Bible and say to God here give it back we don't want it anymore we want to get rid of it it's too hard and I'm sure these people were ready to take this word from God and say take it back we don't want it anymore because of what

Christ had done well that's how the story goes and suddenly the mood of the whole congregation changed when they heard this those who had been saying what gracious words were did he get this learning the same people had said when they heard this all in the synagogue were filled with wrath now that word wrath is a wonderful word I mean it's a wonderful word not in what it is but in it's a wonderful New Testament word it's a it's a very surprising one you know when you when you read of murder and rape and violence the New Testament says it all comes out of this one word it's the uncontrollable rage which takes over and forces people to do what they would never have dreamt of doing there's an interesting article in the province today about how to detect families in which the father is liable to turn and murder members of his own family in a fit of violence they figured out what the symptoms are but it belongs to so many people you don't get anywhere because there are so many people have the potential for such disastrous things and that's this word wrath they were filled with it took over in their lives do you want to know another lovely place where this word appears it appears in the ten commandments when it says thou shalt not covet be filled with this surging powerful violence that takes over your life and they were filled with this rock that's what the sermon did for them and the sermon was now over it's thought that this was Jesus first sermon in Nazareth and undoubtedly it was his last they only wanted to hear one and I guess most people only want to hear one sermon unless they're prepared to do something they rose up and put him out of the city and led him to the brow of the hill on which the city was built and as you drive up in the bus up to Nazareth they point out to you on the right hand side as you're going up towards it from Jerusalem area they point out to you this this very sort of it gives you the same sense of awe that that the what's the big mountain that the chieftain isn't that it the one up at where is it at Squamish you know that only this one has great sort of pinnacles of rock and I mean it's just a dreadful looking place and that's pointed out to you as the place to which Jesus was led in order that they could throw him down headlong and they led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built that they might throw him down headlong but passing through the midst of them he went away you see the wonderful thing about this is that it comes to the point because this action of the congregation is simply a foreshadowing of the cross it was that they wanted to put him

to death this was a foreshadowing of the screaming crowd in Jerusalem that cried crucify him crucify him that same word rock which had taken hold and it's the word for mob violence which took hold of them and took them outside the city and took them to the edge of the hill where they might throw him down to his death and it was a foreshadowing of the cross and a terribly profound way of saying to us in very simple terms the end of our encounter with Jesus

[21 : 27] Christ somebody has to be crucified you or him that's that's the way it is and that's what what Christ that's how Christ preached him and that's how that's how the sermon was conveyed to them and on the basis of that encounter that's got to happen and it's not fun really it's deadly serious and it's you see the difficulty is that Jesus wanted undoubtedly to do something for this congregation at Nazareth as undoubtedly he wants to do something for all of us here tonight individually or corporately he wants to do something for us but they couldn't hear him and their expectations of him were for something dramatic something interesting do for us what you did in Capernaum he says I can't because a prophet is not without honor except in his own house and this terrible familiarity which we come into you know it's dangerous coming here to church on Sunday evenings like this so you can just get inoculated against the gospel you can become familiar with the stories and never be brought to the place where you recognize the consequences of it perhaps we're not hearing as we are meant to hear perhaps Jesus is not able to do for us what it is his purpose to do and on those grounds there's not much point coming back next week is there I mean there is that reality to it that

Jesus has things he wants to do in your life and mine we must be open to that we must allow remember how difficult it was for Nahum and the Syrian when when Elisha said go and dip seven times in the river Jordan he said me in that river you must be out of your mind and in high indignation he drove off and spun his wheels as he went no doubt it's no until somebody was wise enough to put his arm around him and say Nahum if you had been asked to do some great thing would you not have done it how much more when you're asked to do this little thing thing should you do it it may be some very little thing that Christ is asking you to do humbling and beneath your pride and dignity and the intellectual stature of you or me unable to do it and the widow of Zarephath who when Elisha came to her and said give it to me my son is dying I am dying this is all we have I cannot give this to you this is all there is between us and starvation nevertheless Elisha said give it to me first she was given grace to do that as we all take part in the communion tonight it's our business to know what thing Jesus as Lord is asking us to do in response to him and I don't think it's going to turn out to be a cosmic event I don't think it's probably going to hit the headlines of the prophets but it can be something of far greater significance since today's headlines are tomorrow's garbage but in our willingness to hear and to allow

Jesus to speak to us we can find some way ahead in our life of obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord Amen now if you could turn please to page 234 in the book of alternative services please stand so that together we confess our faith using the words of the Nicene Creed I believe in one God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible and in one Lord [27 : 23] Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God begotten of the Father before all worlds God of God light of light very God of very God begotten not made being of one substance with the Father through whom all things were made who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin and was made man was crucified also for us in the conscious he suffered and was buried and the third day he rose again according to the scriptures and ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of the Father and he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead whose kingdom shall have no end and I believe in the Holy Ghost the Lord the Lord the

Father and Son who with Father and Son and the Lord of life who stayed by the cross and I believe in the Holy Father of the church and the God of baptism of the righteous sins and I look for the resurrection in the day the life and the Lord of the will you kneel please just while I'm getting myself organized if you would be quiet a moment and try and recall what the sermon has what God has said to you through the sermon just take about a minute think about what you're going to do with that word that you've heard are want working those have to be