

January 24, 2010
Epiphany 3

"Jesus- Hometown Hero or Lord and God"

LUKE 4:14-21

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. ¹⁶ He 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. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ "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, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ 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, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Remember last January when Sully Sullenberger, an airline pilot for US Airways safely landed a 320 Airbus on the Hudson River with 155 people on board. Time magazine listed him as one of the top heroes of 2009. When he returned to his hometown of Danville, California, he received a hero's welcome. People of Danville were proud to say, "I know Sully Sullenberger. I met him personally."

When Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth at the start of his public ministry in Galilee, the people of Nazareth were proud of their Jesus, the carpenter's son. The word was getting around about the miracles Jesus was performing such as changing water into wine and healing sick people and casting out evil spirits. Large crowds gathered around him to hear him speak. It should not surprise us that when Jesus came home they wanted him to read the lessons in the synagogue and it should not surprise us that a large crowd was there.

What Jesus said to the people of his hometown so shocked them and infuriated them that after the synagogue worship service they dragged him out of town and tried to throw him over a cliff. He shocked them by reading the well known words about the Messiah from Isaiah 61 and telling them these words referred to him. And when the people would not accept him as their Lord and God, Jesus told them they were no different than people from the past who rejected and killed the Old Testament prophets. Jesus' hometown people wanted to admire him as their hero, a great prophet sent from God with miraculous powers, but they were not willing to accept Jesus the carpenter's son as their Lord and God.

Who is Jesus Christ? Is he just a local boy that grew up and made a huge impact on people world wide with his teachings about love and getting along with others, or is he our Lord and God and Savior? That's the most important question of every age.

The hometown people wanted to admire Jesus

We are told, "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him." It says that everyone praised him. They praised him for his words that were spoken with authority. They praised him for his miracles that helped people. They praised him for his kindness and love. No one has ever shown greater kindness and love to other people than Jesus did.

The best form of advertising today is still word of mouth publicity, people sharing with other people about a product or person they really like. Imagine the excitement in the people when they saw first hand how Jesus cast out evil spirits from people, or the joy of seeing a lame man healed so miraculously that he was able to jump up and down even though he never walked in his life. It says that the news of him spread through the whole countryside. People started following Jesus just as they do rock stars and famous people today.

Remember the Michael Jackson trial that was held in Santa Maria a few years ago? People came from all over the world to get a glimpse of Michael Jackson. Or remember how the paparazzi stalked Princess Dianna and even contributed to her death in a car accident? When Jesus came home and walked down the streets of Nazareth, the people wanted to follow after him. They were so proud of what had become of the carpenter's son. They were delighted that Jesus would read the Scriptures when they gathered together in the synagogue in Nazareth.

Listen to this glowing tribute of Jesus: "Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put His foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself... While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. While He was dying His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth - His coat. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Nineteen long centuries have come and gone, and today He is a centerpiece of the human race and leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that were ever built; all the parliaments that ever sat and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.

But there is so much more to Jesus than a great person in world history.

The Lord leaves us here on this earth to tell people the truth about Jesus, that he is Lord and God. In his book *Born Again*, Charles Colson, tells how his life had fallen apart and how a Christian friend challenged him with this question, "What do you think of Jesus

Christ?" He writes in his book how he admired Jesus as a great teacher, but then upon further study of the Bible he was led to see and believe that Jesus was his Lord and God.

This past week, NBC news interviewed a Christian man, Dan Woolley, from Colorado who survived the earthquake in Haiti. The hotel in which he was staying with other US citizens collapsed and trapped him for over 60 hours. He told how he used his Apple iPod to find directions on how to apply a tourniquet and also take pictures of where he might find an escape route through the tangled mess of debris. At the end of the interview he showed a blood stained notebook in which he had written notes to his children and to his wife, encouraging them to stay close to the Lord, and telling them he would see them again in heaven if he died and was not rescued. Millions of people heard this man give witness to his faith in the Lord and his confidence in a reunion again on the last day.

Very few of us will have such an opportunity to give witness to our faith before millions of people, but we will have the opportunity to tell people one on one who Jesus is and what he has done to rescue us. It says in our text that Jesus "returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit." He has given that same Holy Spirit to his believers in these last days. Acts 1 says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." The prophet Isaiah predicted that Christians like you and me will be called, "Oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for this display of his splendor." Just as Jesus stood up to tell the people of Nazareth the truth about himself, so he allows us to bloom where we are planted to simply and openly and freely confess with our lips and our heart that Jesus Christ is our Lord and God and Savior.

Jesus wanted the hometown people to adore him as Lord and God

Jesus wanted his hometown people to do more than just admire him as hometown hero. He wanted them to believe in him as their Lord and God. We are told that he went to Nazareth and he went in to the synagogue on the "Sabbath day was his custom." From the time he was a little child Jesus loved being in the synagogue with his parents and members of his community, just as we love being with our fellow Christians in worship and singing God's praises. That morning they gave Jesus the honor of reading the Scriptures. He was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolls the scroll to a very specific place, just as we would turn the pages of our Bible to look up a very specific verse of the Bible. He turns to the portion of Isaiah where the Messiah speaks of the Spirit of the Lord coming down on him.

Listen again to these words that Jesus read. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." He finishes reading, hands the scroll back to the synagogue leader and then sits down to talk to the people. Instead of standing to preach or teach, they sat down. The eyes of everyone were focused on Jesus. This was their hometown hero and they wanted to hear every word that he had to say. It wasn't a long message, just a few words of comment on what had just been read. Jesus told them "Today this scripture is being fulfilled in your hearing." It was a short sermon, but oh so powerful. Jesus was claiming that he was the Messiah, the Christ, the one anointed by the Holy Spirit to do things only God could do. "The Holy Spirit anointed Jesus or appointed

Jesus to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent him to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Freedom-that's what Jesus means to you and me this morning. We were born prisoners, locked up by our sin, beaten every day by Satan who loves to make our lives miserable. We see people around us with no real joy and peace in their lives, because they are being beaten up so badly by sin. They are angry at the world, angry at their family members. They open themselves up to sinful behavior patterns with sex, greed, pride, rebellion and hatred for God. Satan has them in his prison cell. He devises every torture possible for them. If he must suffer in the lake of fire, he wants them with him. We know how much Satan would love to pull us back in that dark dungeon where there is no hope, so he can enjoy beating us up every morning. Jesus gives us freedom. The Revelation says, "To him who loved us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests." That's the ultimate freedom. The full debt of sin has been paid for you just as all debts were forgiven in the year of jubilee for God's Old Testament people. "He came to pay a debt he did not owe, because we owed a debt we could not pay." So much more than a hometown hero, Jesus is our Lord and Savior. Amen.