

CHRIST OUR PROPHET
Sermon for the 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany, 2021
Luke 4:17-19

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Last Sunday we dwelt on the theme of the Person of Christ, today we shall see Christ as our Prophet. Therefore, our text for today is Luke 4:17-19: **He was given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, He found the place where Scripture had said:** ¹⁸ **“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me because He has anointed Me to tell the Good News to poor people. He has sent Me to announce freedom to prisoners and restoration of sight to blind people, to set free those who have been oppressed,** ¹⁹ **and to announce the acceptable year of the Lord.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our entire religion, our faith, is based entirely on one name – Christ Jesus. In John’s revelation of Christ, he hears Him say, *“I am the Alpha and the Omega.”* The first and the last. He is the *“One Who Is and the One Who Was and the One Who Is Coming, the Almighty”* (Revelation 1:8). Simply put, Christ is the first and the last in all our religious thoughts and teaching. When the Apostle Paul wished to tell the Corinthians in an emphatic way that his teaching had been very simple and that it had all been revolving around Christ Jesus, he said, *“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified”* (1 Corinthians 2:2). The heart of the Good News is *Jesus’ atoning sacrifice*, and our great heavenly Master Himself steps up before us to tell us in simple words that He is *“the Way and the Truth and the Life”* and that *“no one comes to the Father except through”* Him (John 14:6). By directing our thoughts chiefly to Him, we are not misunderstanding the Christian message or running counter to His will, and our confession is like the house built on the rock.¹ It has often been said that there are only two religions in the world. Christianity and everything else. Un-Christian religions teach a system of tenets and rules, but proper and true Christianity teaches and proclaims a person - Christ, and Him alone.

Of course we all know this, however, we must never forget that we stand in constant need of being reminded of this peculiar character of our sacred religion, lest we be swept into the popular current of the day, because the Church is under constant attack by forces wishing to make Christianity a religion that teaches salvation by *good works*, or into a religion that has significance chiefly for this life, finding its fulfilment in *social service*, that is, in being accepting of every kind of way of life, accepting people for “who they are,” not expecting them to give up their way of life, even if it is running contrary to God’s will. We think of such things as homosexuality being accepted in some so-called Christian churches as loving relationships etc. There is no Law preached in these churches, only Gospel. Against these constant attacks, we must hold in all simplicity to the great truth that Christ must be the chief subject in all our religious teachings and must be described as our Great Prophet.

Christ is our Great Prophet. This is stated very directly in several Scripture-passages, but perhaps a well-known prophecy is that of Moses, recorded in Deuteronomy 18:15 which reads, *“The LORD, your God, will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your fellow-Israelites. You shall listen to Him!”* This is the chief passage in the Book of Deuteronomy and is a clearly expressed prophecy of Christ as the new Teacher. When we fast-forward to the times of the New Testament, after the resurrection of Jesus, He appeared next to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and asked what they had been discussing with each other. Their reply was, *“The things about Jesus from Nazareth, who was a Prophet, mighty in what He did and said before God and all the people”* (Luke 24:19). Jesus’ teaching and mighty deeds showed Him to be a prophet, as predicted. And then, of course, we have proof from our text today that He is a Prophet in very truth.

After His baptism and victory over the temptations of the devil, Jesus had begun His career as Teacher, and taking part in the synagogue service on a Sabbath day in Nazareth, read a portion of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. We find that portion today in chapter 61 of our Bibles. This was a section speaking of the Messiah. Having read it, Jesus then

¹ Matthew 7:24

makes the startling statement that *“today, while you are listening, this passage of Scripture has been fulfilled”* (Luke 4:21), asserting thereby that He is the promised Messiah, of whom prophets from of old spoke.

As we see Jesus as the Great Prophet, we may further ask what *equipment* did He have for the office of Prophet?

As we consider the equipment Jesus had as the Great Prophet, let us stop for a minute to consider the meaning of the word “prophet.” A true prophet, to be true to his name, must receive a revelation from God, which he then proclaims to the people. In other words, *the Spirit of God must instruct and guide him in his utterances*, so that what he declares is not his own message, but that of the great Lord.

He is a “forth-teller,” not merely a “fore-teller.” Forth-telling, proclaiming the message that God has given him, is the business of the prophet. This may involve foretelling or a prediction of future events. Still, it is by no means the *only function* which he has to fulfil. All this helps to bring out that, if anybody was to be a true prophet, then he must stand in need of being in contact with the Spirit of God, who communicated to him what he should preach.

Did Jesus have this equipment? Absolutely! Look at the text and listen to Jesus say, **“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me.”** Think of the baptism of Jesus, where the Holy Spirit descended upon Him.² Think of it that Jesus Himself sends the Holy Spirit³, being, as it were, the Fountain from which this holy Gift, Power, and Person proceeds. He had not only received the Holy Spirit, like Moses, Elijah, and others, but He even gives the Holy Spirit. What an inexpressibly rich endowment for His work! There are of course, other truths pertaining to this endowment, such as the fact that He has come from heaven, having been, according to His divine nature, in existence from all eternity. When He speaks of divine, heavenly things, He utters what He knows. *“No one has ever seen God,”* says John, *“the only God, who is in the lap of the Father, has made Him known”* (John 1:18). Jesus could easily have emphasised all this, but confines himself to this one significant point prophesied by Isaiah - the Messiah, Jesus Himself, the Christ, the One standing before them in the synagogue, is in full possession of the Holy Spirit.

As such, let us always think of Jesus. In viewing His teachings, whether it be the Sermon on the Mount or in the parables He taught, the words He spoke about the mercy of God in receiving sinners, or the wonderful discourses in which He describes Himself as the Good Shepherd laying down His life for the sheep, let us be fully aware that we are face to face, not with the outpourings of human wisdom, not merely with the brilliant sayings of a superb thinker, but with the very teachings of the great, divine, eternal Spirit of God.

If anybody was to be a true prophet, he had to be sent by God. Israel was very much plagued by people who rose in its midst with the claim that they were messengers of God, while in reality, God had not sent them. Again and again, in the Scriptures, it is pointed out that the mark of the true prophet is that God has called him and sent him forth, while the mark of the false prophet is that he has appointed himself to the office which he claims as his own. Speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, the LORD God had said, *“I have not sent these prophets. Yet they have been running. I have not been speaking to them. Yet they have been prophesying”* (23:21). Jesus too warned of many false prophets that would come into the world.⁴ If Jesus was a true Prophet, it is indispensable then that He should be sent by God. Look at our text. Jesus says, **“He has anointed Me to tell the Good News to poor people. He has sent Me to announce freedom to prisoners and restoration of sight to blind people, to set free those who have been oppressed.”** The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews also calls Jesus *“our Apostle”* (3:1). This is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus is referred to as our Apostle, and involves the thought of mission, referring to one who is commissioned for something. God has sent His Son as the authorised envoy to speak for Him and carry out His will. It is very clear, therefore, that in dealing with Jesus we are not in touch with a false teacher, but with One whom God the Father Himself has called and invested with authority to be our Teacher. Listen to Him. Believe His teachings. He is the One who proclaims: *“The person who rejects Me rejects the One who has sent Me”* (Luke 10:16).

A prophet must have a message. One cannot imagine God sending an ambassador to be a teacher and then failing to provide him with a proclamation to bring to those to whom he is sent. The Old Testament prophets all had a message, as we see from their writings. Sometimes their message was a burning one, castigating disobedient people, at other times their message was one that was comforting and brought healing balm to the bruised and wounded souls. Think of the message that Jesus has for us today. Our text describes it beautifully, partly in figurative language, speaking of

² Matthew 3:16

³ John 16:7

⁴ Matthew 7:15

spiritual blessings in terms taken from the physical world. These are the outstanding terms: **“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me because He has anointed Me to tell the Good News to poor people... to announce freedom to prisoners and restoration of sight to blind people, to set free those who have been oppressed,¹⁹ and to announce the acceptable year of the Lord.”** All this means that a time of grace and mercy are given - a time in which forgiveness of sins is provided and freely dispensed and preached. The prophets had looked forward to this message with glowing longings. Now the One had come *who presented it as His own*, and how different a message it was from that which was the chief burden of the preaching of Moses! Moses, the greatest prophet of God in Old Testament times, mainly had to tell people of their sins and had to crush them in order that they might come to a sense of their sins and of the punishment they had brought upon themselves. The message of Jesus, however, brings grace and truth, help for the poor sinners who realise their unworthiness, and comfort for the agonised soul calling out, *“What must I do to be saved?”*⁵ Its content is briefly expressed in those priceless words: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).

In these latter days, in a time when we see forces within and without the church doing all they can to destroy the saving message of the Gospel, when we ourselves battle daily with our old sinful self, do we daily meditate on the beauty of the teaching of our Prophet, and are we grateful for its consoling content? Do we dwell on it every hour of our lives?

Dear friends, Jesus not only had the equipment for the office of Prophet, the call, and the message, but He also performed the duties of His office in a grand way. Our text shows Him in the fulfilment of His duties, and showing Him proclaiming the message with which He has been entrusted and doing it with grace and power. What blessed days for Galilee when on the hillsides or in the crowded synagogue He spoke to wondering multitudes the saving mysteries of God’s counsels. Yet we, living some two thousand years later, still have the benefit of it; for the record of what He said at that time has been preserved to us, and we may sit at His feet with the fishermen and labourers, the scribes, and the people of lowly estate who crowded about Him in those wonderful years. To make His preaching effective, He in turn has sent messengers who repeat the life-giving tidings which He Himself proclaimed. He has given us the office of the holy ministry, which is continuing the work that He Himself performed in the days of His flesh. When we read our Bible, the sacred, inspired record of what He said and did, He is acting as our Prophet. When our pastor addresses us from the pulpit, announcing to us God’s saving decrees, it is Jesus Himself who is serving us in the role of Prophet. Are we His followers? When finally the day comes on which heaven and earth will pass away, then it will be evident that the message of this Prophet does not pass away, but that it does abide forever. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for wanting all people to worship You in spirit and in truth, and for making that possible by the light of Your Word. We, Your people, who have gathered to worship and praise You, now offer You our thanksgiving, praise, and prayer.

We thank You, Father, for sending Your Son Jesus Christ, and for making known through Him Your loving purpose that all who believe in Him may have everlasting life. We give You thanks for our redemption through His cross, for the forgiveness of our sins, for deliverance from all evil, and for the sure hope of eternal glory. We praise You for the gift of Your infallible Word, through which Your Spirit has given us saving faith. Send forth Your Word with power so that many may come from east and west and rejoice in Your saving mercy. May Your kingdom be filled with believers from every nation and tribe though they are sinners like ourselves, so that heaven and earth together may ring with praise for Your great salvation in Christ.

Renew our minds. Cleanse us from every sin. Lead us along the path to eternal life. Grant that we may trust Your love and power. As we live out our short spans of life, make us spiritually wise, so that in humility, forgiveness, and love, even to those who hate us, we may reflect Your grace. Help us so that we may not be conquered by evil, but may rather conquer all evil with good. Grant that we may use well the charismatic gifts that You have provided for the good of all. Heal us of every disease. Uphold those who face the test of sickness or other suffering. Guard our loved

⁵ Acts 16:30

ones wherever they may be. Shield us from the powers of wickedness. Give us each day our daily bread, and make us contented in every circumstance.

Watch over Your Church. Give it pastors who are true shepherds and faithful teachers of Your people. Continue to bless the ministry of the AELC and the ULMA.

Give wisdom and understanding to those who are entrusted with the responsibilities of governing our country. Grant them a concern for Your will, and the desire to rule in such a way that all people may live in quietness and peace.

These things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer who loved the Church, and gave Himself up for it: Amen.

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Jonah 3:1-5, 10

¹ The Word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time. He said: ² “Leave at once for the large city of Nineveh! Announce to it the Message that I tell you!”

³ Jonah got up and went to Nineveh, as the LORD had told him. Nineveh was a large city before God. It took three days to walk through it. ⁴ Jonah began to enter the city and walked for one day. He proclaimed: “There are still forty days until Nineveh will be overthrown!”

⁵ The people of Nineveh believed God. They proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them... ¹⁰ When God saw what they had done, that they had turned away from their wicked conduct, God relented from the calamity that He had threatened to send on them and He did not do it.

1 Corinthians 7:29-35

²⁹ This is what I am saying, my fellow-Christians: the time has been shortened. From now on even those who have wives should be as if they had none! ³⁰ Those who weep should be as though they were not weeping! Those who rejoice should be as though they were not rejoicing! Those who buy should be as though they did not possess! ³¹ Those who use the world should be as though they were not using it! For the form of this world is passing away. ³² However, I want you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the affairs of the Lord, how he may please the Lord. ³³ However, he who has married is concerned about the affairs of the world, how he may please his wife, ³⁴ and his interests have been divided. The unmarried woman or the virgin is concerned about the affairs of the Lord, so that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. However, the woman who has married is concerned about the affairs of the world, how she may please her husband. ³⁵ I am saying this for your own good, not to throw a noose on you, but

with a view to good order and that you may be devoted to the Lord without being distracted.

Mark 1:14-20

¹⁴ After John had been arrested, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the Good News of God: ¹⁵ “The time has come, and the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe in the Good News!”

¹⁶ While He was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Simon’s brother Andrew casting a net in the sea. For they were fishermen. ¹⁷ Jesus told them, “Come and follow Me! I shall make you fishers of men.”

¹⁸ They at once left their nets and followed Him.

¹⁹ When He had gone on a little farther, He saw James, the son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were also in their boat, mending their nets. ²⁰ He called them at once; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed Him.