

"Doing the Hard Thing"

Text: Luke 4:16-30

Grace be to you and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who was gracious enough to reveal himself as Lord and Savior, even to sinners like us. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, there is a big difference between what we want and what we need. The fact is we actually need very little. The overwhelming majority of what we struggle so desperately to acquire falls under the "want" category. Now, having said only this much let me ask you what came to mind when you heard of "wants and needs"? It is more than just unfortunate that we almost always think in terms of material things, even when we are asked such questions *in a sermon*. Why is it that we never think first about spiritual things? Even in our own self-criticism, our thoughts turn most naturally to material things, and yet material things will all but take care of themselves when we tend to our spiritual needs. So our Lord taught us to **"seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."** You and I have learned from experience how hard this can be.

This morning we are going to tend to the spiritual needs; we are going to talk about *spiritual* needs and wants, and about doing the hard things in life. What we will find from our study of God's Word is that, once again, what we want is usually fairly easy, and usually not what we need, and what we need is usually neither easy nor desirable – as far as our flesh is concerned. Our text is found in the Fourth Chapter of St. Luke's Gospel:

Luke 4:16-30 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; ¹⁹ To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." ²⁰ Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹ And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." ²² So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is

this not Joseph's son?" ²³ He said to them, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.' " ²⁴ Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. ²⁵ "But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; ²⁶ "but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷ "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, ²⁹ and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. ³⁰ Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

So far the very words of God. May God the Holy Spirit give each of us a wise and receptive heart so that we might accept these as the words of God alone, and to utilize and treasure them accordingly. To this end we pray, **"Sanctify us through Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

Has there ever been a Child of God who has not felt inadequate in one way or another (or perhaps in nearly every way)? Who ever feels that he knows enough, reads enough, studies enough of God's Word? Who believes that he prays enough, is wise enough, is strong enough in the faith? Who imagines that he can grow no more, witness no more, encourage no more? Who among us can claim perfection – or even near perfection – in anything?

The good news, thanks be to God, is that that is not the basis for our eternal hope and confidence. We have no perfection of any kind apart from Jesus Christ. God the Father did not send his Son to save the good and righteous. Jesus came for sinners - wretched, helpless sinners. The Lord did not look down from heaven and see strength and wisdom and compassion. He saw weakness, foolishness, and brutality. In other words, he saw each one of us as we really were – stubborn, rebellious, unlovable ingrates. God the Father's reaction? He gave his most treasured possession to redeem and rescue us. Rejoice, fellow Christians, you have been washed clean, and you stand now before a just and holy God without spot or blemish. You

are perfect in his sight. All has been paid by our dear Lord Jesus Christ.

How can it be then that we continually find faults and imperfections in ourselves? How are we to understand the apparent contradiction that a perfect God sees us as holy, though we sin every day and are still mired in imperfection and lovelessness? The explanation is not that God overlooks our sin, or that he turns a blind eye to it, pretending that it doesn't exist. The explanation is that the punishment for the sins of the world has been visited upon Jesus Christ. Our sin debt can never exceed the payment made by our Lord Jesus. Again, **"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."**

What *is* troubling now, to those of us who recognize what Jesus has done for us, is the fact that we continue to see so much that is wrong in our lives, so much that needs correction or improvement. There are times, in fact, when we see little in our lives (if anything) that is as it should be. All of this should serve not to discourage us, but to magnify our Savior, and our *need* for our Savior.

Once again we come back to our theme for this morning – *Doing the Hard Thing*. Our text clearly demonstrates that while we continually seek the easy way out in so many critical areas of life, Jesus did not. Jesus was a realist. For example, when you heard the part of our text that read, **"...as His custom was, He (Jesus) went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day..."** how did you react to those words, if at all? It is, after all, what we would expect, isn't it? We simply assume that Jesus, being a spiritual person, would go to church whenever he could. But was Jesus' attendance in the synagogue easy? Not according to our text. Another question: Did Jesus go to the synagogue because he *needed* to go to church or because he *wanted* to go to church? The answer is probably "Both." Jesus certainly loved to be in his Father's earthly house, and therefore his attendance was a *want*. Did he also have a *need* to be there?

We tend to think of Jesus as always giving and never himself *needing* anything. That simply wasn't true. Jesus went to church in large part because he *needed* to go to church. He *needed* the strengthening that came also to him through the Word of God. Remember that Jesus is described as being a man just like you and me, only *he* was without sin. (He was also true God while on earth, but he set aside the full use of his divine power when he placed himself under the mandates of the law.)

Think back on how often we read that Jesus **"went away for a time to pray"** or even **"continued all night in prayer"** (Luke 6:12). Jesus, as

true man, needed spiritual strengthening. He sought and found that strengthening by hearing the Word of God at church, through study of and meditation upon that Word of God, and through prayer. The next question is obvious: *If Jesus needed to make regular church attendance "his custom", don't we? If Jesus recognized his own need to pray regularly, what does that say to you and me?* Everyone here today has a need to be fed by the Word of God; unfortunately that's usually not what we *want* – and it seems to be getting harder and harder to do for so many.

Jesus did the hard thing whenever it was the right thing. There is another example in our text. In this case it is an example of Jesus knowing that what the people wanted to hear when and what they needed to hear were two different things. Our text describes a time in Jesus' life when he was very popular. We read here of Jesus that **"He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all."** At this point in his life, Jesus could easily have maintained that popularity. All that he had to do was to adopt the politically correct speech of his day. He could, for example, condemn the worship of idols. He could condemn prostitutes, thieves, murderers, extortionists, rapists, and all Gentiles – especially the Romans. In fact Jesus could have gone on preaching some fine sermons and enjoying the favor and support of all the people, yet he lost their support – in a big way. We read later on in this same chapter that the very same crowd that in our text gives Jesus its rapt attention, suddenly turns on him viscerally. *Why* did they turn on him? Not because he spoke what was not true, but because *they did not like what they heard*. You heard their reaction in our text: **"So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff."**

How could this be? One moment they adored Jesus and the next they were trying to toss him off a cliff. What happened? The exact thing that is *not* happening today: *Jesus did the hard thing by giving the people what they needed rather than what they wanted*. Jesus told them what they *needed* to hear, not what they *wanted* to hear.

Jesus used the realist's approach to sin problems. This was the approach he knew he *had* to use with the Jews. Remember that these were Jews *in the synagogue* – pillars of the church. They had a nice coat of paint that hid all of their obvious flaws. As he approached them, Jesus had two options: he could treat the problems as if they didn't exist (in which case he would continue to enjoy popularity) or he

could expose the problems and offer solutions, knowing that he would pay the price. Why did he choose the latter?

The answer lies in the very text that Jesus read to the Jews. Notice that Jesus did not just happen upon these words from Isaiah. We read that **"He found the place where it was written..."** Jesus was looking for this text and he read it at this time and to this crowd for a special reason. Remember this was Jesus' hometown. He knew these people well, knew that they had been lulled to sleep in their false, work-righteous religion. Most had undoubtedly heard this text dozens of times, but like all other texts in God's Word they had long since tuned their ears to hear only what they wanted to hear in these lessons. To them **"freedom for the captives"** meant release from Roman rule. **"The poor," "the captives,"** and **"the blind"** to them were all references about how mistreated *they* were. In their ears, these words spoke to them as innocent victims, not as guilty sinners in need of a spiritual savior. Jesus turned the passage completely around to its correct understanding and it shook the Jews to their very core. It enraged them. Jesus told them that they were indeed the **"poor... captives... blind... and oppressed,"** but they were all of these things *spiritually*, not physically, not materially and not politically.

Jesus had come to save **"the poor, blind, and oppressed prisoners."** Yet he could do nothing if they refused to be helped. The Jews refused to acknowledge that they needed help of any kind. They were perfectly content with the hollow praises they had been used to hearing. They didn't want Jesus to look any closer than the paint job. That was just how their game was played.

That same damning delusional sleep has crept into both our society and our churches today, and it can and will seduce every single one of us if we allow it to do so. Certain things in life will always be hard, yet we live in a world that has come to expect that everything will always and only get easier, faster, less painful. The inevitable result is that we come to imagine that if something is hard, we shouldn't have to do it – like getting up for church, reading and memorizing Bible passages, studying God's Word, disciplining our children, disciplining ourselves, witnessing to others, giving our hard-earned money to church, denying ourselves some of what we desire so that we *can* give to church, exercising self-control, practicing patience, giving of our time, sharing with those in need, practicing humility. The list is endless. None of these things will ever be easy, since we will always have that loathsome, selfish, lazy, self-centered old Adam dragging us down. That is why day by day, moment by moment we struggle to put on the new man – that good and holy part that has been renewed in us by God the Holy Spirit. With man, by our

own might, these things are hard to the point of impossible. But not so with God. With God all these things are more than just possible.

Jesus has already done the hardest thing when, in our place, he paid our sin debt. The result is that we stand holy and righteous in the sight of our God – washed clean and forgiven. May that same God give us the love and strength to give to our neighbor what he needs, rather than what he wants. Amen.

Scripture Readings

NKJ **Nehemiah 8:4-10** Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground. ⁸ So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading. ⁹ ¶ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this day is* holy to our LORD. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

NKJ **1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26-27** For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ ¶ For in fact the body is not one member but many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where *would be* the smelling? ¹⁸ But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. ¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where *would* the body be? ²⁰ But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*. ²⁷ ¶ Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

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The Third Sunday after Epiphany – January 24, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#398- (Red Hymnal)

"Renew Me, O Eternal Light"

The Order of Morning Service – Brown Hymnal page 12.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Nehemiah 8:4-10) The Christian faith was always intended by our God to be a balancing act – in many ways. There is a time to be sad and a time to rejoice; a time to sorrow over sin and a time to rejoice in forgiveness. So also in our first reading we recognize that the children of God, above all others, ought to be able to rejoice in the goodness of our God.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 118 (Page 29)

The Second Lesson: (1 Corinthians 12:12-21, 26-27) Our entire society works, in part, because we are not all the same. Every individual has different gifts. So too in God's Church, where he has also given a variety of gifts. All are to be used to His glory and for the building up of each other. So let it be among us.

The Confession of Faith – Nicene Creed (Brown Hymnal page 5)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#410- (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Lead Thou On"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 4:16-30 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"Doing the Hard Thing"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) – Brown Hymnal page 16 insert

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

Pre-Communion Hymn -#325- (Verses 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"O Thou that Hear'st when Sinners Cry"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn #315- (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#293- (Red Hymnal)

"O Holy Spirit Grant Us Grace"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Last Sunday (56) 2010 Average (52)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Mid Week Bible Study
Next Sunday	-8:45 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship hour

CLC News – Pastor Andrew Schaller has returned the call to Sleepy Eye and New Ulm, MN. Those congregations have now called Pastor Eric Libby. Pastor Jay Hartmann has accepted the call to Corpus Christi, TX. Pastor Peter Reim has announced his retirement from the pastoral ministry and intends to pursue a teaching career.

CLC History – As part of our Synod's 50th Anniversary celebration, a history has been compiled by Professor David Lau which is about to go to press. To aid in determining the number of copies to be printed, please sign the sheet on the entry table if you are interested in purchasing a copy.

CLC Basketball Tournament – The annual CLC Youth Basketball Tournament is scheduled for March 12-14. Please speak to the Pastor if you have a child interested in participating this year.

Pastor Steven Karp Aid - Pastor Steven Karp is facing mounting medical bills from on-going cancer treatment. Those who would like to contribute to this need can make their check out to St. Paul with a note on the memo line: "Pastor Karp Medical Fund." Contributions can also be sent directly to St. Stephen Lutheran Church, 21290 Birch Street, Hayward, CA 94541.