

# "Doing the Hard Thing"

Text: Luke 4:16-30

Grace be to you and peace, from God our Father, and from our Savior Jesus Christ, who saved mankind by doing that hardest thing imaginable. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: with the advent of modern technologies and conveniences, the human race finds itself in ever-increasing danger of adopting the delusion that *nothing at all* needs to be difficult. In fact the mantra of technology has always been "*Easier is better.*" You want to guess what the next technological breakthrough will be? Identify things in your life that are hard, unpleasant, or just take effort that you do not really want to expend, and imagine how those things might be done more easily or with less effort. It has always been that way. Don't like having to get out of your car to lift a heavy garage door? A remote controlled machine now does that for us. Don't like the time and effort it takes to wash dishes by hand? Again, just stack them on racks and a machine will automatically wash them for you. Don't want to shovel snow? Again, we've got machines for that.

So what about tomorrow? Don't like having to hold your cell phone next to your ear? Count on communication devices of the future that solve that problem. Don't like typing ("keyboarding" or "data entry" as it is called today)? Data input of the future will likely be accomplished by just *thinking* the words. Not real big on parallel parking? Cars are now doing that automatically.

The problem here is not that all of these conveniences and technologies are necessarily bad; the problem is that they are helping to create the illusion that nothing at all in life needs to be hard or unpleasant. That simply isn't true – and never will be. More than that, it is dangerous in the extreme to imagine anything of the kind.

This morning we are going to talk about some of those "can't be avoided hard things in life" – and of the need to actually do those hard things. The text that will so guide and instruct us this morning is found in the Fourth Chapter of St. Luke's Gospel:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 4:16-30** *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, <sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." <sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup>*

*And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." <sup>22</sup> And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" <sup>23</sup> And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." <sup>24</sup> And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. <sup>25</sup> But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, <sup>26</sup> and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. <sup>27</sup> And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." <sup>28</sup> When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. <sup>29</sup> And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. <sup>30</sup> But passing through their midst, he went away.*

So far the very words of God. May God the Holy Spirit give each of us a wise and receptive heart so that we accept these as the words of God alone, and utilize and treasure them accordingly. To this end we pray, "**Sanctify us by 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 the perfection of Jesus Christ – the goodness that was not *earned* by us but that is now *credited* to us. God the Father did not send his Son to save the good and righteous. Jesus came for sinners - wretched, helpless failures. 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 precious Savior, 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 Savior. Again, **"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."** Note well. The victory is not earned by us; it is *given to us* on the basis of what Jesus did, what he accomplished.

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. Most times, in fact, we see nothing at all in our lives 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. One of our greatest, ongoing failures – even now that we have been brought to spiritual life through faith in Jesus Christ – is our ongoing reluctance to do the hard things that are necessary in life.

Once again then we return 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 this in our text: **"And as was his custom, he (Jesus) went to 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 just assume that Jesus, being a spiritual person, would go to church whenever he could. But was Jesus' attendance in the synagogue easy? The event described in our text was certainly not easy, but beyond that do you imagine that Jesus was never tempted to be lazy, to sleep in, or to do something that required less effort and concentration?

Understand that Jesus didn't just go to church because he wanted to; he also went because he needed to. The bottom line however is that he went – not because it was the *easiest* thing to do but because it was the *right* thing to do, the *necessary* thing.

Don't you 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.

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 even when not at church, and through prayer. The obvious

question then is: *If Jesus needed to make regular church attendance "his custom", don't I? If Jesus recognized his own need to pray regularly, what does that say to me?* Everyone here today has a need to be fed by the Word of God; unfortunately that's often 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 and what they *needed* to hear were two different things. Our text describes a time in Jesus' life when he was extremely popular. We read here of him that **"all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth "** 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 preached fine moral messages and could have thereby continued to enjoy the favor and support of all the people. Only he didn't. We read in our text that the same folks who once adored him suddenly turned on him. *Why?* Not because he spoke what was not true, but because *they did not like what they heard*. You heard their reaction in our text: **"When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. <sup>29</sup> And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down 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* – church-going folk and pillars of the community. The problem was that while they were all nice and shiny on the outside, they were rotten on the inside. They trusted in their own goodness, rather than in their Savior's goodness. Knowing this, Jesus had two options: he could treat the problem as if it didn't exist (in which case he would continue to enjoy popularity but the people would be confirmed in their unbelief) or he could expose the problems and offer solutions, knowing that he would pay a terrible 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. He looked for this specific reference and read it at that time and to that crowd for a

specific reason. Remember this was Jesus' hometown. He knew these people well. He 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. 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 at 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 – especially when he included the hated Gentiles in God's salvation plan. Yet though his words incited only rage, they were offered in purest, divine love.

You and I face similar circumstances every day. Certain things in life will always be hard, like lovingly and humbly condemning sin and witnessing our faith. 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, going to bed early enough on Saturday night so that getting up on Sunday morning isn't so difficult, reading our Bibles, carefully studying that Word of God, disciplining our children, disciplining ourselves, giving our hard-earned money to church, denying ourselves some of what we want 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. For the most part none of these things tend to be easy, since we will always have that loathsome, selfish, lazy, self-centered old Adam advocating for the easy, painless, pleasant alternative. That is why day by day and moment by moment we struggle to put on the new man – that good and holy part that was created in us by God the Holy Spirit when he brought us to faith.

Jesus has already done the hardest thing when, in our place, he paid our sin debt. The result is that we now stand holy and righteous in the sight of our God – washed clean and forgiven. Knowing this as we do, trusting this as we do, God grant to each of us not the burden of a debt owed, but the freedom to walk – willingly and joyfully – in harmony with his will. Even when it's hard. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Nehemiah 8:4ff.** And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose... <sup>5</sup> And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. <sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ...the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. <sup>8</sup> They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. <sup>9</sup> ¶ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and 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 or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. <sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 12:12-27** For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> ¶ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. <sup>21</sup> 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." <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, <sup>24</sup> which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. <sup>27</sup> ¶ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Third Sunday after Epiphany – January 24, 2016**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 398 (Red Hymnal)

"Renew Me, O Eternal Light"

## The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

## 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 and in the joy of our salvation.

**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 God 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 -

The Nicene Creed – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 412 (Red Hymnal)

"May We Thy Precepts Lord Fulfill"

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

**"Doing the Hard Thing"**

## The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

## The Offering followed by the Prayers

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

"O Thou that Hear'st when Sinners Cry"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

## The Distribution -Hymn 316 (Red Hymnal)

## The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 325 (Verse 6) (Red Hymnal)

"O Thou that Hear'st when Sinners Cry"

## 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** - Sunday (32) Average (48) Organ Fund (\$16,120) Goal (\$22,000)

## This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/coffee time
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/coffee time

**CLC News** – Pastor Wayne Eichstadt has accepted the call to Gethsemane of Spokane, WA. Copies of the latest CLC financial report are available on the Entry Table.

**ILC Professor Nominations** - The following have been nominated to fill the upcoming professor vacancy at ILC: Dwight (Frank) Gantt, Paul Naumann, David Reim, Peter Reim, Michael Roehl, David Schaller, Stephen Sydow, Paul Tiefel II, Matthew Ude, and Mark Weis. All comments from members of CLC congregations regarding these candidates are to be submitted no later than February 12, 2016 to: Mr. Craig Ryan; 499 Country Lane; Fulda, MN 56131; E-Mail: [cryan@page1printers.com](mailto:cryan@page1printers.com).

**Care Packages** – The Women's Fellowship is accepting donations for care packages to be sent to our four members attending college out of town. Donations should be left at the church prior to February 7, which is the day the supplies on hand will be packed and distributed. For more information please refer to the card in your mailbox, or speak to the President of the Women's Fellowship, Cindy Ollenburger.