

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany, January 23, 2022

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminster, Massachusetts

The Year of the Lord's Favor

Luke 4:16–30

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

From the Gospel reading:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Jesus. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

**“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,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”**

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. And He began to say to them,

“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (vv 17–21).

As we push deeper into January and further into 2022, perhaps, like me, you find yourself wondering what this next year will bring. The track record for the last couple of years isn't great, though you don't need me to tell you that. We been living it. And that track record leaves us uncertain what to expect *this* year. Will it be more of the same? Will it be different? Better? Worse? What, if anything, have we learned from the first three weeks of this new year?

Jesus preaches to people who wonder the same thing. He has a message for those who are poor in body and soul, for those held captive by sin and death, for those with blinded eyes and hearts, for those oppressed by the devil, his works, and his ways. It's a beautiful message of good news. To those long ago in the synagogue at Nazareth and to us today, He says:

THIS IS THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR.

I.

So what exactly does this mean? In your opinion, what would make for a favorable year? A natural reaction is to think that the Lord's favor means prosperity and success, the sort of year you could boast about in a Christmas letter. We might think of job security, children thriving in studies and work, better relationships, a productive garden, or good weather. We might think of better health or medical advances. We might think of inflation slowing down, the stock market taking off, or supply chains getting straightened out. We might think of Supreme Court rulings and mid-term elections going our way, especially as we pray for an end to Roe versus Wade and offer even more help for those with unplanned pregnancies. What else could a year of favor be, if not sunny days, happy lives, fat wallets, good health, and political victories?

Such wishful thinking isn't the same thing as the year of the Lord's favor. If we define the favor of the Lord by how well our lives are going, then we'll often be disappointed, and we'll probably be disappointed again this year. The goal of His favor isn't our happiness but our eternal salvation. And the Lord can work out our salvation in good times and in bad, in prosperity and in adversity—and sometimes adversity does even more for our salvation than prosperity does. So don't judge by what you see or feel. Judge by what you hear—by the Scripture that fills your ears and is fulfilled in your hearing today.

Jesus first announces the year of the Lord's favor to the people in Nazareth. He does it by turning to the words written by Isaiah the prophet:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,” He trumpets,
“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,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (vv 18–19).

Jesus announces what is known in the Old Testament as the year of Jubilee. God had appointed every fiftieth year as a special time of release, restoration, and rest. Every fifty years, beginning on the day of atonement, a trumpet sounded throughout the land to mark the start of this year of freedom. Slaves and indentured servants were liberated. Debts were forgiven. People returned to their family homes and property. It served as a little picture of what the Messiah would do. He saves and restores His people. He frees creation from its bondage. He brings release from sin and its effects.

We don't know how often the people of Israel celebrated the year of Jubilee in Old Testament times. Jesus isn't simply bringing *another* Jubilee. He says that He *is* the Jubilee. He—in His person and work—He is the year of the Lord's favor. He brings the salvation and release for which the world longs. He brings the salvation and release for which *we* long. He comes **to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor** to you.

This is the year of the Lord's favor because of Jesus and what He gives. True, we are poor, pitiful sinners, yet He showers us with His forgiveness. We have often made a mess of our lives and the prospects for the future may not look great, yet He shows us grace. We don't have to wonder how we stand with our God. Jesus reveals our standing to us: We are under God's grace. For Jesus' sake, we have His favor.

II.

For us, in Jesus Christ, this is the year of the Lord's favor, no matter what else this year may bring. But for Jesus, ushering in the year of favor for us brings disfavor for Him. The people in Nazareth found it difficult to believe what He said in that synagogue. Oh, they understood His words perfectly well. They heard what He was saying. They **marveled at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth** (v 22). Why did they marvel? They marveled because of what they knew about Him. They knew Him to be "**Joseph's son**" (v 22). What He was saying didn't match up with who they thought He was. Jesus gets it. He says, "**No prophet is favored in his hometown**" (v 24). They see only His flesh; they cannot see His divinity. They want the year of the Lord's favor, but they want that favor without going through Him. They want a Jubilee year without Jesus Christ.

It goes downhill—or, you could say, over the cliff—quickly. Jesus points out how the prophets Elijah and Elisha were rejected by the people of Israel but welcomed by strangers and foreigners. The sorrow described in Nehemiah is the sorrow over God's people having rejected Him and turned from His ways. They had sought favor apart from God. Nazareth is repeating the same mistake. **He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him** (v 11).

When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove [Jesus] 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. But passing through their midst, He went away (vv 28–30). He begins by announcing God's favor to us, and He ends in disfavor. There is a cost to God's grace, His favor. A price must be paid. The price is His suffering and death. The events in Nazareth foreshadow what lies ahead. A cross hangs over that cliff. The year of the Lord's favor requires atonement for our sins. It comes through blood—the blood of Jesus.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,” Jesus said (v 18). The blessed Holy Trinity is at work through Him. The Father sends His Son. The Spirit rests upon Him. And He ushers in the year of the Lord’s favor through His dying and rising again.

III.

This—not just 2022 but every year redeemed by the blood of Christ—is the year of His favor. It began with Jesus’ earthly ministry and His first sermon in Nazareth. It was accomplished by His death and resurrection. It has no end. We have a blessed Jubilee in Christ. We stand under god’s grace and favor. This is true no matter what comes—perfect health and sunny days or storms and death. This is the year of grace and favor. Jesus comes again with blessing. He forgives our sins and sets us free from bondage. He gives the medicine of immortality, Holy Communion, to our sick and dying bodies. He casts Satan out and delivers us from our captivity. This year is the year of the Lord’s favor, a year of grace, because Jesus delivers that grace to us again and again. It comes through His word and preaching. It rests on us in the absolution. It enters our mouths through the Lord’s Supper. We’re blessed to sit at the feet of Jesus. Our times are in His hands.

Don’t grieve over what you see and hear in the world around you. Pay close attention to the word of the Lord. Strive to understand what you read and hear. Go your way. Eat the fat that He gives. Drink the wine that He provide. Share with those who have nothing. **For the joy of the LORD is your strength** (Neh 8:10). Sound the trumpet of forgiveness and release!

Christ is our head, and we are members of His body. **If one member suffers, St. Paul said, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together** (1 Cor 12:26). So it is, dear friends, for Christ suffered and so we suffer, too, but Christ is risen from the dead, seated at the right hand of the Father, and honored, so we rejoice together with Him. For we know that, in Jesus, *this is and ever shall be* the year of the Lord’s favor, world without end.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7
