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Epiphany 4

Luke 4:20-32

LET CHRIST'S WORD BE
YOUR ONLY DESIRE

Perhaps the natural assumption is that visitors may be turned off by a church's centuries-old liturgy, unpretentious hymnody, and stiff formality. Why do we make that assumption about the visitor? It is worth examining our hearts on that –perhaps for a reason we might not expect.

The author of the book The Defense Never Rests, Craig Parton, relates his personal experience. He had grown up with what he called “church lite,” l-i-t-e. Everything on Sunday morning was upbeat and praise-song-ish. Handclapping, interactive sermons and theater seating were normal Sunday fare. In his adult life he began to be troubled by the lightness of it all. It seemed as though the very format did not encourage taking God's truth seriously –especially Christ's death and

resurrection. After much soul-searching and church-searching he and his wife hit rock bottom. They visited a Lutheran church.

It was, of all days, Good Friday. He said there was a medieval feel to the place. The service began with words many of us are familiar with: *Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against you in thought, word and deed...* The pastor followed that with the absolution by Christ's atoning death. Parton writes: "[My wife and I] were overwhelmed. There was the shock of looking down into the chasm and realizing the depth of our sin. But at the same time there was the wonder of gazing up to Christ and grasping the immensity of His love and sacrifice for us." Parton and his wife were not turned off by what they saw and heard. They were more like the wide-eyed grade school child on his first field trip to the Lincoln Memorial. They were in awe.

The point is not about worship format. The point is to look at our own assumptions and ask why?

The portion of God's Word we are meditating on today from Luke chapter 4 forces us to do just that –look at

our assumptions and examine our hearts. Is the Word of God enough for us? Or are we looking for something else?

The people in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth were looking for a little something extra. It was a worship service in the local synagogue. Think of it: The Word of God Himself was preaching to them. Here was their salvation standing before them. Jesus. He is everything. The sum and substance of everything. There is nothing else. But Jesus pointed out, *I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his home town.* If your sibling became famous, you might not be impressed. To you they are still just your sibling. When Pastor Werre goes to visit his mother, he's not Pastor Werre. He's just her youngest boy. Even Jesus was just Joseph's son. The folks in Jesus' hometown weren't satisfied with His preaching. They wanted something more.

Jesus said to them: *Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'* They had heard of the miracles Jesus did in Capernaum. That's what they were hoping to see. The Scripture lesson, fine. The preaching, fine. The truth, the message of salvation, the Word. Fine, fine,

fine. We already have that. But that's not enough. Show us the miracles.

Is that you? When we think about that church visitor, is our assumption that the Word itself will not be enough? That there needs to be something more to make it captivating? Is that you?

Are you of a mind that it's *all* about the visitor. "I don't really need it for myself because I already know who Jesus is. I don't really need the Word, not for myself." Is that you?

How about a woman I once knew who had been a weekly church goer for many decades. Yet when I visited her she asked, "What happens after we die. Is there a heaven? Will I go there?" It would seem all those years she never listened, never paid attention, never applied any of it to herself. Just sat through it all. Is that you?

What about that distressed person who has real suffering but reflexively reaches out for help to anyone or anything except their Bible, "because it's doesn't do anything for me and I want the pain gone right now!" Or the individual who is so consumed by all that is

happening politically that the Word gives them no peace anymore. Is that you?

How about the guy who has so much going on. “Besides, I don’t do much reading.” So his house is like a desert of God’s Word. No family devotions. No personal Bible study. Who has the time? Besides, what’s to know? Is that you?

Jesus’ answer to the worshipers in Nazareth and His subsequent action are terrifying. Jesus said to them: *I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed –only Naaman the Syrian.* These words are dripping with insinuation. The point is when the Israelites neglected and despised God’s Word, God sent his prophets out of Israel to bring the Word of salvation to foreigners.

How did the Nazareth folks react to Jesus’ warning? Did they repent and say, “We see your point, Jesus! Your Word should be our only desire!” No. They

became outraged. They pushed Him out of the synagogue and dragged Him to the edge of a cliff. Then Luke 4 says, *But Jesus walked right through the crowd and went on his way. He went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people.*

Are you getting chills? You should. You see, the Nazareth folks got their miracle, after all, when Jesus walked right through them. But it was a miracle of judgement on them. Jesus left them and preached the Word elsewhere –to the people of Capernaum.

That's the most terrible judgement possible from God. For salvation is given only through His Word. Without His Word there can be no salvation. Therefore let's you and I not react like the people of Nazareth. Let's not get angry with anyone but ourselves. You and I who take His Word lightly, who doubt its power, who are looking for something else more interesting. Let's have a change of heart lest God take His Word away from us.

For it is through His Word and only through His Word that we learn of Christ's atoning death on the cross for our sins. It is only through His Word that Christ shares with us Himself, His counsel with God before time, His

incarnation, His fulfillment of all prophecy, His descent into hell, His resurrection, His ascension to the right hand of God, His intercession on behalf of the Church, and His final return in glory to claim His redeemed people.

It is only through His Word that we receive forgiveness from God, relief from guilt, peace with our Creator, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the birth and the strengthening of our faith, the resurrection of our bodies from the dead, shelter in our troubles, the fellowship of the Church and the only righteousness that is successful before God.

It is only through His Word that God Almighty opens up His heart and thoughts to us and gives us Christ and salvation and by which He answers our prayers.

He owes us nothing. But He has broken into our world and given this Word because He loves us and wants to save us. Therefore, let us be jealous about hearing His Word. Let us learn it, digest it, believe it, treasure it, cling to it, make it our number one routine and hold it as our favorite thing, our only true desire. Let it be for us our way and our life. For as long as we have the Word, we have Christ. And as long as we have Christ in His Word, He will remain with us and not walk away.

