Text: Luke 4:16-30

**Introduction**

If you’ve been in a bible story with me you might have heard me tell my Jubilee year story. It is pertinent today for a couple of reasons. Jesus in our gospel lesson is declaring ‘the year of the Lord’s favor.” The passage he’s reading is from Isaiah 61. Jesus is claiming the prophet Isaiah’s reworking of the original Jubilee year. The second reason is that the pope has declared a Jubilee year this year. You might have seen the anime mascot they created for it. And if you are willing to make a pilgrimage to Rome, you can enter one of the 4 papal basilicas through the Holy Door and receive a plenary indulgence. The thing that kicked off the entire Reformation is still available. You too could spring any soul you are concerned about from purgatory anytime during this year. Now Rome typically has these every 25 years. Although they will occasionally call a special one. I happened to have taken a Roman trip during an earlier one, and being a smart aleck thought having such an indulgence would be quite funny. I have lost the paper in all the moved since then, but I was guaranteed that all my youthful indiscretions shall not be held against me for millions of years in purgatory.

I suppose that is too caustic or sarcastic for the pulpit. But it really does focus on what the Reformation was really about. Either Jesus really does forgive sins. Either he really is the Son of God with the sovereign right to forgive when and where he wills – wholly and completely. Or his grace comes with significant caveats.

**Text**

I don’t want to bore you, but understanding a bit about the Old Testament history of Jubilee I think is necessary. The Original Jubilee, decreed as part of the law with Moses, was supposed to be an every 50 year occurrence – a Sabath year of Sabath years. After Israel entered the promised land and everyone received their portion of it all kinds of things were expected to happen. Maybe you would sell your land. Maybe you would sell yourself into slavery. Maybe you took on debt for various reasons. Every 50 years, in the Jubilee year, all debt was to be forgiven. All slaves set free. All land would return to the family that received it originally. Just speaking such things your mind can start to imagine the effects such a Jubilee might have on society. You never really owned land. You only held it in trust for a generation. If the next Jubilee is only a couple years hence, it’s a rental. All debt would be short term. There are other Jubilee year regulations. It is pretty much in Leviticus 25 if you want to look it up. But the other things that should be mentioned. There is no recorded history of Israel ever observing a Jubilee year. The Chronicler of Israel closes out his book noting that the years of the exile in Babylon – 70 – were the total number of missed Sabath years. “All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years (2 Chr. 36:21).”

So Isaiah the prophet in chapter 61 is speaking to the generation that would return from exile. And his reworking of the Jubilee is that after those 70 years in exile, Israel would finally experience a Jubilee. Good news for the poor, liberty to the captives, liberty to those oppressed or in debt. This is to be the year of the Lord’s favor, his Jubilee, where the land would be restored. What had been promised to the people of God would once again be given.

And so Jesus shows up in his home town. He has been preaching and working miracles in Capernaum and Galilee. This is early in his ministry. And “as was his custom, he went to the Synagogue on the Sabbath day.” So the next time someone dismisses the habit of church attendance, remember that it was your Lord’s habit. And because Jesus is the hometown boy doing amazing things, he is asked to be the guest preacher. “The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.” And he reads these words. And you can imagine the excitement swelling with every word. People all over have been wondering, “Is this the one?” “Who is he exactly?” He has come home to make his big announcement. And in one way Jesus doesn’t disappoint. “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

**Christology**

And still today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Your sins are forgiven. In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all you sins. You have been freed of your eternal debts. You have been freed from your bondage to sin and your oppression by Satan. Jesus is our divine Jubilee. And as long as you are in the body to hear that proclamation, today is the day of grace. It is not by anything we have done or will do. God owes us nothing. The Jubilee is pure grace. In his sovereign choice Jesus was incarnate and bore the cross. And gives to us freely of himself.

That Justification comes to us from outside of us. It is proclaimed to us. But it is always grace. There is no bait and switch. You don’t need to perform penance or work it off in purgatory. It is free. And the second I, or a Pope, or an angel or anything tries to stand between you and that grace – we have become the usurper. We have attempted to carry some old debt past the Jubilee. And we are no more than those modern debt collectors who try to get children to pay off debt of deceased parents or debt that was bankrupted. The grace of Christ has freed you and the old sin cannot pass that Jubilee. Satan and whoever he might send to try and collect can be told to go away. They have no standing.

**Moral**

The problem with Jubilee – with such prodigal grace – is that we thing we have standing. Sure we want it for ourselves, but surely the debts against us must be paid in some way.

This is one of the hardest passages of the New Testament. But I think this is what Jesus digging at when he says, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’” Jesus has been working miracles all around Galilee. Nazareth is his hometown. They have a claim on him. Jesus, when are you doing for us, what you did for them?

The younger son in the parable of the prodigal felt he was owed something and demanded it. At the end of that parable though he is completely dependent upon the grace of his father. What gets revealed is that the older sone feels he has a claim. And he hates the Jubilee that Dad is putting on. Like wise the parable of the vineyard workers. Everyone receives what is promised. God keeps his promises. But those who showed up first and bore the heat of the day complain. They feel they have a claim. They hate the generosity – the Jubilee payment.

Grace to us is wonderful. Grace to others can be understandable. But grace to others who owe us?

And Jesus cites back to them two precedents: The widow of Zarephath and Naaman. Both gentiles. Both from those who have oppressed Israel.

In one way the grace of God comes to us all equally. Your sins are forgiven. But not all receive that grace in the same measure. And the day and the time and the nature of the grace given is up to God.

“When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.”

Maybe it depend upon the amount forgiven. The one who has been forgiven much, loves much. But the working of grace in the world can have this odd effect. We get mad at what others have received. Because we think God is not fair.

**Eschatological**

And He isn’t. But we should be glad that he isn’t fair.

If He were fair, he would never have become incarnate. If we all got what we deserved we would still be in bondage to Satan. Instead of expectations of resurrection, all we would know is death. If God were fair we’d all have ashes.

But God is not. He gives us his own son. He gives us his grace. We are all heirs of the resurrection. Like Jesus we can walk through things temporal without losing the things eternal. And that walk is not fair. But it is the walk that God has given to us. It is the good works laid out in advance for faith to walk in.

We can be angry at grace, or we can rejoice with the angels at sinners saved.

When the Jubilee comes, the debts are paid. Don’t be a debt collector trying to scape of living off of old debts. Join in the Jubilee. Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.