



Ash Wednesday Sermon

The Spirit Anointed Christ for Mercy – Lenten Worship Series

Mercy forever.

Based on Luke 4:18-19

“When Messiah comes, blessed be He, He will bring good news.” That was the prayer of believers through the centuries as they watched and waited for the promises of God to be fulfilled and the Messiah to be revealed. Then one day in the synagogue of Nazareth, a young hometown man stood up and said that the Messiah had come and it was He. His name was a common one, Jesus – Savior, but from that day forward He would bear a title – Christ; Anointed one; Messiah.

He said that He was anointed to bring good news. He read from the great Old Testament book of Isaiah, the 61st chapter. What was the good news? What was the Messiah anointed to tell? What was the Messiah anointed to be? It’s all about mercy. That will be our theme and our subject as we follow Jesus to the cross and the tomb in this Lenten season. We are going to focus on mercy and our merciful high Priest, Jesus. We are going to focus upon how those that He saved and redeemed have been saved and redeemed to live merciful lives. It is all about mercy.

First we have to go back to our catechism classes. My Savior had two names: Jesus and Christ. Jesus means Savior and Christ means Anointed One or Messiah. Jesus was anointed to a three-fold office: Prophet, Priest, and King. He was anointed to free us from the unholy three: sin, death, and the power of the devil. That is the story of Lent and it is all about mercy.

Prophet

[Illustration – I used to ride through the Badlands of North Dakota with real cowboys. One day while out on horseback I noticed that one of the guys was really down in the dumps and depressed. I asked him what was wrong and after a litany of problems, trials, and tribulations he said, “Sometimes I feel like Hell is a half a country mile away and all the fences are down.” I thought that was a particularly evocative statement. Because of the peace that Christ brings and because He is our peace, all of us can say that eternal life and hope are not even half a country mile away – they are all around us and in us, and all the fences are down!"]

He was anointed to be Prophet; to preach God’s Word, the Good News. What Good News did He preach? Paul says in Eph. 2:17, “ He preached peace to you who were far off and you who were near.” Paul says in Col. 1:19-20, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” He gave the peace that passes understanding. He brought the peace between God and man and between men because all the walls that divided us are down. He came to give a peace that the world cannot give. No wonder the angel said at His birth “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.” And then a whole bunch of angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men

on whom his favor rests.” He continues to be our Prophet through the preaching of simple pastors in the church. Whenever the Gospel is proclaimed, Christ is still the Prophet.

Priest

He was anointed to be Priest, a merciful High Priest, which meant He was to sacrifice on behalf of the people and to intercede for them. Because of His sacrifice on the cross, the people of God would be clothed like a bride ready for her husband and their unworthiness would be covered by His righteousness. He would be sacrificed on the cross because God so loved the world, it is what He sent His son to do. He would be sacrificed on the cross, and because He was, the sins of the whole world have been forgiven. And He would rise again from the dead, and because of His rising, we would have peace with God.

Think of this: if you pay attention to your Bible, a lot lot of people rose from the dead or were believed to have come back from the dead. Some thought Jesus was a prophet brought back to life. Some thought John the Baptizer was a prophet risen from the dead. A widow’s son was raised from the dead. An official’s daughter was raised from the dead. Lazarus was raised from the dead. Half the municipal cemetery of Jerusalem was raised from the dead on Good Friday. Yet none of these resurrections were considered Messianic by anybody! None of those resurrections turned the world upside down. But when Jesus was raised from the dead, it became the mark of salvation for the whole world. It was Jesus who “was raised again for our Justification.” Because Jesus was raised from the dead the Kingdom of God was established forever.¹ Why was He different? Why was He special? Because He was anointed.

King

Remember the words of the angel to Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” All people are to be brought into this Kingdom. The Kingdom is God’s complete control over the hearts and minds of people.

But what does it look like, this Kingdom? It is a Kingdom where we are free from the power of the devil and the bondage of sin. It is a place where we are adopted as God’s children and given an inheritance that cannot spoil or fade; where we are at peace with God. It is a place where “spoiled specimens of humanity”² are integrated and the image of God is restored. It is a Kingdom not like the kingdoms of this world, and because it is not, some question, like John the Baptizer did, is Jesus the Messiah or not? Christ’s answer was simple. He told John’s disciples to go back and tell him, “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Luke 7:22).

The Anointing

Yes – the Baptizer. We need to think about him because this is where it all started. What happened at the Baptism of Jesus was His anointing to be Prophet, Priest, and King. “When all the people were being

¹ For this section I am indebted to a little book
Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1970) 49

² *ibid* page 50

baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased’” (Luke 3:21).

John preached that the kingdom of God was at hand and that the mighty one of God was coming. He would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, He would be the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

My uncle grew up a fundamentalist Christian in the South. He tells how on weekends he would wake up to a parade outside his house with all sorts of folks walking to the river and how the boys at the sides of the crowd would shout, “come on, you all, there’s going to be a dunking.” The folks at the Jordan when Jesus was baptized might have heard someone say, “come on, you all, there’s going to be an anointing.” Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power to be Prophet, Priest, and King.

It’s all about mercy. The kindness and generosity of God our Savior appeared in Jesus. By the sacrifice of our High Priest, our sins are forgiven. By the proclamation of our anointed Prophet through the church — the dispenser of His undeserved love – we come to faith and are transferred into the Kingdom of Light where our risen King rules. It is all about mercy. As Luther says, Christ mercifully, “sinks and sticks Himself in to the water” as though He were any ordinary sinner, so when we go into the water we may pull Him out with us. We see in the account of Jesus’ Baptism that the heavens are mercifully “torn open” (Mark 1:10 NIV) and the Father speaks. Luther states: “Heaven which before was closed, is opened by Christ’s baptism and a window and door now stand open for us to see through. No longer is there a barrier between God and us, since God himself descends at the Jordan. The Father lets His voice be heard, the Son sanctifies baptism with His body, and the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove.” In this life we find sin, death, and misery. In Baptism we find God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the Triune God of mercy, life, and love, and we find that, mercifully, “heaven is nothing but windows and doors.”³

It’s all about mercy. We can do none of this ourselves. As one of our theologians has said, “The whole work of our Lord may be summed up in this, that He founded upon earth the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God. But the kingdom of God is the community of men, in which God is the absolute and undisputed master. God is love, and therefore the kingdom of God is a kingdom of love; and the community of those who have been reconciled to God in Christ must hallow its whole life and conduct by love. The whole duty of members of the kingdom of God is comprehended by our Lord in one word: ‘Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,’ and again: ‘Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.’ The righteousness of the kingdom of God, which our Lord enjoins upon His people, is nothing else than the ordering of their whole life in accordance with the law of love.”⁴

We can do none of this ourselves. We cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, come to Him, or do anything good. But because of our mercifully anointed Prophet, and our mercifully anointed Priest, our mercifully anointed King, and His death on our behalf, we are free to be merciful. As Luther said: “Therefore, if we recognize the great and precious things which are given us, as Paul says [Rom. 5:5], our hearts will be filled by the Holy Spirit with the love which makes us free, joyful, almighty workers

3 Matthew Harrison, *Christ Have Mercy*, (St. Louis, Concordia, 2008) 33

4 Johann Uhlhorn, *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*, (New York, Schribners, 1883) 57

and conquerors over all tribulations, servants of our neighbors, and yet lords of all. For those who do not recognize the gifts bestowed upon them through Christ, however, Christ has been born in vain ... Just as our neighbor is in need and lacks that in which we abound, so we were in need before God and lacked his mercy. Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christ to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians.”

Conclusion

We have a long road ahead of us. We follow Jesus to Jerusalem, to the cross and the tomb. Our Lenten journey will again show us the kindness and generosity, the mercy of God. But the journey is wasted if we do not understand that we can live merciful lives and as Luther said, “be truly Christians.” It is all about mercy poured out for us so that we can be merciful.

So tonight we will do some anointing ourselves – we will anoint our foreheads, or at least mark them with ashes. We are dust and to dust we shall return – we are sinners indeed. But we are also blood children of God, a kingdom of Priests, a holy nation, a people shown mercy so that we can be merciful. Let the ashes remind you how far you need to go. Let your Prophet, Priest, and King lead you there.

Amen