

'On hearing'

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

You must be renewed in mind and spirit, and put on the new nature created in God's likeness. – Eph.4,23-24

Collect: Living God, in Christ you make all things new. Transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives show forth your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

1 When to our world the Saviour came,
the sick and helpless heard His name;
and in their weakness longed to see
the healing Christ of Galilee.

2 That good physician! night and day
the people thronged about His way;
and wonder ran from soul to soul –
'The touch of Christ has made us whole!'

3 His praises then were heard and sung
by opened ears and loosened tongue,
while lightened eyes could see and know
the healing Christ of long ago.

4 Of long ago: yet living still,
who died for us on Calvary's hill;
who triumphed over cross and grave,
His healing hands stretched forth to save.

5 Those wounded hands are still the same,
and all who serve that saving name
may share today in Jesus' plan –
the healing Christ of every man.

6 Then grant us, Lord, in this our day,
to hear the prayers the helpless pray;
give to us hearts their pain to share,
make of us hands to tend and care.

7 Make us Your hands! for Christ to live,
in prayer and service, swift to give;
till all the world rejoice to find
the healing Christ of all mankind.

Words by Timothy Dudley-Smith

Lk.4,21-30 'Jesus in Nazareth'

Dear friends

What do you do when you are somewhere with other people, conversing and chatting, or waiting and minding your own business, perhaps just standing and wondering, and you hear the words: “Ladies and Gentlemen, may I have your attention, please!”? Most likely, you stop your conversation, you put down your book, you lower your glass if you are in the middle of drinking, you might shift your position a bit and strive mentally to rise above any noise still left in the room: because you are getting yourself ready to hear the announcement about to be made (the announcement presumably which will tell you what you are there for!).

Well, it’s what we have here, in this passage of Jesus’ visit in Nazareth. His actions and words draw attention (like a voice saying over a tannoy: “Can I have your attention!”), and people ready themselves not to miss what’s coming next. But while we may readily understand that situation in such terms, it’s important we understand the spiritual significance of it: that the preaching of the gospel, because it is the witness to Jesus Christ and his ministry, is just such an announcement – that it is one for which we ought to stop our own conversations (!) because it opens up the one that tells us what we are here for, because it is the one which comes with the word of God who says “Can I have your attention please!”, which all ought to hear who have ears to hear.

You may ask, what reason do I have for saying this? Well, it’s here in the Word of God: in the extraordinary (because spiritually all-enlightening!) statement Jesus makes in v.20 - as *the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him - : ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’* For, do you notice what Jesus is saying here? He is saying that the fulfilment of all that scripture says about the way in which Jesus is your concern according to God’s will, stands *in your hearing*; that the fulfilment of his ministry to you - your redemption, stands *in your hearing*; that the fulfilment of God’s saving word that is Jesus Christ, stands *in your hearing*.

That is: Jesus here elevates the activity of *hearing* to such a prominent place in the matter of faith, that the implication is that everything he has said and done is like the statement of God saying, “Ladies and Gentlemen, can I have your attention”, because it is in one’s hearing that one is then able to receive all.

The Word of God through this passage speaks to us of the vital matter that is *hearing*. Indeed, it is so vital that without hearing, if we look for real fruit of the ministry of Jesus, this ministry might as well almost not be happening (and the preaching of the gospel might as well almost not be happening, might as well almost be replaced by many another thing). In fact, Mark does tell us in his Gospel expressly that when he was in Nazareth, Jesus “*could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few people who were ill and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith*” (Mk.6).

We understand the importance of asking: What then of this *hearing* that makes God’s Word come true / come through according to its promise, for those that hear?

At first it seems the people in Nazareth *do* hear. “He speaks well”, they say, “It is a pleasure to listen to him” “Yes, isn’t he great?” Yet there is something in their hearing that does not hear! And it’s this circumstance that Jesus brings to light. And how the mood changes when he does! What seemed to be embrace turns out to be no more than a light cover over a rage that is ready to kill.

Now by way of illustration, let me say that I am sometimes guilty of this kind of ‘hearing’ (I’m talking about the hearing, not the rage!) – when hearing I don’t hear! This guilt comes to light when I ask my wife about something she has only just told me and believes I have heard– yet it turns out that hearing I didn’t hear! But the point is that this is the kind of thing that goes on in the spiritual realm.

So we ask: what is this hearing that does not hear? [In biblical terms: What is it about our hearing that makes Jesus say repeatedly, ‘*He who has ears, let him hear*’?] The key is in the question the

people in Nazareth ask themselves and one another, *'Isn't this Joseph's son? Aren't his brothers and sisters here among us? Isn't he of us?* It is a rhetorical question, and therefore not one that is open to who Jesus is, to who is speaking, not open to what the weight of his word might actually be. In fact, their question is designed to size Jesus down to their own size.

Now what is going on? What is this saying? Not to be too long about it, it's two things – two sides of one coin: The people there hear, but do so without believing the word; and also (the other side of the coin) they believe that they hear, but do so without hearing what the word says. These are both attitudes that prevent the kind of hearing through which God's Word works such as to be fulfilled in those who hear.

Are these attitudes prevalent in us, in our church? This must appear in our encounter of the truth of Jesus Christ through Scripture.

Do we hear what God's Word says without believing what it says, without believing whose word it is? Do we hear the word, but say, 'It is of us!' and refuse to hear *what is not of us?* Do we hear the word, but on the condition that it wears *our* outfit? Or do we believe, yet do so without listening to God's Word, as though nothing stood to be fulfilled "in your hearing"?

There is a hearing without believing and a believing without hearing. And both is a condition of hearing-impairment towards God's Word, towards the salvation He wants us to know and have.

In the examples he gives, Jesus colourfully draws attention to this and also to the fact that God's Word is fulfilled both in judgment and salvation. The Word of God when it was withheld in judgment from Israel to show it that it was hearing without believing and believing without hearing, was sent to the widow in Zarephath, surely as a witness to the people of God; when this widow heard the words the prophet spoke to her she not only heard but also believed (she went and did what was asked of her) and she was saved; and it was sent to Naaman the Syrian who believed what he was told back in Syria and then, after doubting at first, heard the word of the prophet and listened and was saved.

Dear friends, Jesus was not got rid of on that day in Nazareth, because there was more for him to do. He had to make a way for God to reach the hearing-impaired and heal them. He was sent to the *lost sheep of Israel*, to judgment and plague, to reclaim them for God's purpose for them of love and truth. This way led him to be rejected and crucified and to his resurrection from the dead. But he thus became the fulfilment of God's plan to save the lost and reclaim them from sin and death, for life and fellowship with Him, as He had announced through the prophets.

When some disciples after his death on the cross still did not comprehend, the risen Saviour said to them: *"How foolish you are, and how slow you are to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*" (Lk.24)

And, dear friends, the Scriptures still bring us this Christ. He is the Word of God we are to hear and believe, to believe and hear. He is the Word of God that by hearing and believing fulfils in all the salvation of God. AMEN

Lord God, by your Word we understand that all that is was made through your Word. By your Word, in those who hear, this your Word works your will. Your Word has become flesh in Jesus and has made you known. Glory by to you and praise for all your Word makes known and brings into being. In your mercy let your Word be received in us richly, make it known to us through your Spirit who guides into all truth. Let not your Word be to us judgment such that we hear your Word but do not believe, or believe in you but do not hear your Word. Out of our own we do not hear your Word. But

you give ears to hear and you give understanding, and from you we seek it – to the praise and glory of your name. Amen

- take time to pray before God, in the name of Jesus Christ and with thanksgiving, all the concerns He has laid upon your heart

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

May the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ shine in your hearts, transform your lives, and brighten the world.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you. AMEN
