

The Third Sunday after the Epiphany of our Lord
 Year of the Lord 2022
 Luke 4

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
 be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my
 redeemer.

Luke 4:16–30 “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.” And all spoke
 well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were
 coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s
 son?”

In the Name of Jesus.

‘Now Y’ALL...ARE...the Body of Christ—and/also,
 members of the Body of Christ, each single one of y’all!’

That’s an arresting picture: the Corinthian church—with
 all its jockeying for status individuals were going; along
 with the other great shame and vice that sticks to all—that
 Church, this Church, the ONE Church, is not ‘LIKE’
 the Body of Christ. They ARE! We ARE! ALL...ARE,
 the Body of Christ!

Who? They are the Body of Christ, Saint Paul reveals, Who take and eat the Body of Christ and drink the cup of the Blood of Christ. A dear teacher had a funny way of speaking: “We are thus ‘bodied-and-blooded’ together, and so we ARE...the Body of Christ!”

My dear ones: revel in this mystery! Let no man separate what God has joined together! One of the worst things that happens to the Gospel is that the devil leads men to MINIMIZE the wonder of the ways of our Christ! To turn from the CERTAINTY of what Christ crucified did for us and still does for us now ascended on high—into a desperate search IN OURSELVES for something that makes us stand out from other men. Lord, have mercy!

An example:

I ordered some Bibles to use in our Bible classes. Nice giant print for grampas with glasses! (Let the people say Amen!)

Now, I still plan on using these. But after all of the wonders of the 66 books of the Bible contained in one handy volume, I noticed there were notes at the back about summarizing the Bible and what it was all about. And because my heart needed breaking, I read it.

Turns out that the Bible—the back of my new bibles says—the Bible is about ME reorienting myself to God, to Jesus; and then trying to be a better person. It helps, the back of the new bibles says, to find something called a ‘bible-believing’ church, join with the people, and find encouragement. And then daily, pray God to make you behave better. If you are worried about your safety with God, if you fall into sin, keep trying and praying and

reading the Bible every day and—I gather!—it is all summed up in, ‘Do all YOU can; then hope for the best!’

Aiyyeeeee!!!! LORD...HAVE...MERCY...ON...US!

Where’s the certainty?! Praise the Lord. We already heard it.

Saint Paul says all God’s Word is about THIS: in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body; as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you do proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes; y’all ARE the Body of Christ!

Dear Christians: believe THAT and you are a ‘bible-believing church!’ Trust that the Holy Spirit baptized you with water and Himself! Live from the Body and Blood Christ gives to the hungry, the poor, the blind, the prisoners. And whatever encouragement and cleaning up our lives and reading the Bible and praying we do—wonderful! But NOT with some hazy notion about what’s going on with God and us, God and each one individually. But with the CONFIDENCE that Christ HAS...NO...BODY...APART from your brothers and sisters, baptized, confessing, and eating the Bread and drinking the Wine that Christ calls His Body and His Blood.

Why was there nothing about the CERTAIN things at the back of my new Bibles? Because what infected Jesus’ hometown synagogue infects the whole world. Those people—if you asked them!—would swear up and down that they believed their bibles, the wonders recorded by the prophets Elijah and Elisha and so much more! But when the carpenter’s son declared in His simple and unthreatening Incarnation that by simply BEING there, with them, the doors of their prison were torn from the

hinges and they would never sit in darkness about God and more:

They moved as a herd out of the synagogue and, as a herd, did their best to push Jesus off a cliff.

So, until Christ comes again—which you declare is more certain than the sun rising or setting even one more time, as often as you eat this Bread and drink this Cup—people will speak well of Jesus Christ, as they did at Nazareth that day. But when weak and unassuming Jesus sits among them and proclaims that HE has brought the Last Day and the overturning of all our attempts to protect and preserve ourselves—they show that men can cheer Jesus on one moment and howl for His death the next. ‘Physician! Heal yourself!’ ‘He saved others! He cannot save Himself! Come down from the cross, and we will believe in you!’ Ha. Ha. Ha.

The Holy Spirit who baptized you speaks to you today THROUGH someone ALMOST as weak and powerless as Jesus: your pastor. I say I am ALMOST as rejectable as Jesus, because, given a crisis or threat, I am very liable to defend myself. The real Good Shepherd doesn’t know how to defend Himself; only His sheep.

But I have as little influence in this world as Christ does. AND.... I tell you that Lord and Giver of Life is speaking to y’all together, and each one of y’all individually: Y’all ARE the Body of Christ!

God CANNOT...MAKE...ONE...MOVE...without first figuring out countless ways that it will work out great for you, for y’all!

That means the daily blessings we cannot begin to number. It also means, dear Body of Christ, the cross, disappointments, and all the woes even those lost in darkness have in store for them now and forever. When what is common to all hits you hard, it hits the Body of Christ!

‘He only will with patience chide, His rod falls gently down. And all your sins He hides away ocean depths to drown.’

‘When through fiery trials your pathway will lie
My grace, all sufficient, will be your supply.
The flames will not hurt you; I only design
Your dross to consume and your gold to refine.’

To draw out a living ‘Amen’ from y’all, from each one of you, your poor pastor cannot execute signs and wonders that impress Jesus’ hometown synagogue. I cannot impress the fans of Jesus of our days, who are as certain about God as they are certain about themselves. Lord, have mercy.

No, to draw out a from y’all a confession that Christ died for all and that He is coming for all, I have for you today broken Bread that is Christ’s Body and a cup of wine that is Christ’s blood;

To ‘body-and-blood’ all of us together, and perform the ONE wonder that the Holy Spirit ALWAYS does to reveal the real God among men, and to free us from what we’ve done:

He makes of you, and me, and all of us, the Body of Christ in the Name of Jesus.