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 Trinity Lutheran Church of Las Cruces
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 Epiphany 3
[Luke 4: 14-21](#)

Jesus' First Sermon: What's God Good For?

There was a hush as Jesus, the hometown boy, strode up to the front of the synagogue, unrolled the scroll, and read the scripture from Isaiah.

People thought they knew this young carpenter – and they were surprised as Jesus began to read with a voice of authority :

*The spirit of the lord is upon me
 Because he has anointed me
 To proclaim good news to the poor.
 ... freedom for prisoners
 ... recovery of sight...
 To proclaim the year of the Lord's **favor**.*

Jesus gives the scroll back... and this is where it gets weird. He says:

Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

We're in the Gospel of Luke this morning

but

The Gospel of John, you may remember, starts like this: *"In the beginning was the _____ and the Word was with God and the Word was _____"*

Jesus is the Word (with a capital W), and God's Word works.

Unlike some of our *human* words....

For example Thursday night my husband and son cooked a terrific steak dinner, searing the steak on my new heavy duty cast iron skillet. So I, gracious wife & mother, I say, "You know what, you guys did the cooking, I'm going to clean up the pan." And the next morning I get up and I think, *Who left that big pan with all the congealed fat and onion still sitting here on the stove?!*

Oh, that's right, it was me. My gracious words last night did not match any action!

God's Word isn't like that. God's word makes things happen.

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Bear with me I'm going to digress a moment...

What do you call words that sound like the thing they describe? onomatopoeia. Examples? *hiccup, ping-pong, sizzle.*

Then there's another kind of language where the words you say actually change reality.

Classic example: *I love you.* You say those words to someone, it changes your relationship.

When I was about 7 or 8 years old, I overheard my mom telling someone "I'm so surprised that Christa's never jealous of Karin [that's my sister], but Christa's always wanting Karin to have the chance to go to the movies or out with friends and she even volunteers to do some of her chores to let her go..."

The irony of that was that moment I had just started coming in o the room to tell my mom, "It's not fair that Karin gets to go out again tonight and I'm stuck with the dishes."

But when I heard my mom's words, I became, for that night at least, the supportive little sister my mom said I was.

Sadly, when you say something hateful to someone, or about someone, it can change reality, too.

Words are powerful for good and for evil.

And I think we've seen and heard more than enough examples of using words for evil in our political climate today, on both the right and the left... and even, God forgive us, from some of us in the middle.

As Christians we need to guard what comes out of our mouths.

And I'm the first of sinners, as my family could tell you.

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Back in the Synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus speaks ancient words of GOOD:

good news to the poor.

... freedom for prisoners

... recovery of sight...

*To proclaim the year of the Lord's **favor.***

Today this scripture is fulfilled.... Says Jesus

That's when people start getting a little nervous. Wait a minute, isn't preaching supposed to be about how God is going to take care of things in the distant future ...

NO, says Jesus.

This is the day the Lord has made, not just yesterday, not yet tomorrow, **this** is the day We are empowered to live God's Way.

Now Pastor Wayne and I have been reading a book by Phillip Yancy called

[Vanishing Grace: Whatever Happened to the Good News?](#) (and P. Wayne will soon be teaching a class on this book so stay tuned)

In the opening chapter, Yancy writes,

“ most people I meet assume that Christian means ... conservative, ...anti-gay, angry..., illogical, ... and they generally cannot live peacefully with anyone who doesn't believe what they believe.” p.23

Why do people despise the church?

Yancy suggest that although the Gospel of John says Jesus came “full of grace and truth...” the church has worked hard on teaching *truth* & spent way too little energy on living grace.

As we look at our church budget and conduct our annual meeting, today, I can quantify how many meetings we've had, how many dollars were spent and what was our average church attendance --

But when have we been good news to the poor?

And how might *you* answer if someone would ask what's this God, this Church good for, anyway?

We don't know exactly how Jesus continued HIS sermon that day in Nazareth, but I'm going to finish my sermon by giving you three examples of God's Word alive today, among us.

I. On Tuesday our Helping Hands ladies were busy laying out red and pink and white cloth triangles to make a gorgeous Valentines' quilt. Most of quilts this group makes goes to the La Casa Shelter, where women who've made the courageous decision to free themselves

and their children and escape home violence, at La Casa they find shelter, counseling, and because of this Body of Christ, they receive a warm quilt made with love.

II. Also this week, this church supported a pastoral visit to someone in the hospital. By his bed he had our church Daily Text devotion book, and his big battered old Bible. *"That looks like a well used Bible,"* I said.

Oh yes he said, His eyes filled with tears, *God tells me I'm forgiven and loved through that Bible. I couldn't live without it.*

III. And third mini-story: this week we welcomed refugee families through our Oak Tree project; three Dads and three little boys. Members and friends of our church prepared cots, served beans and pizza, carried out loads of laundry.

On Wednesday morning I watched little Rene, play with our manger scene in the narthex for at least an hour. Years ago, as I heard it, our church Sunday School committee bought this crèche made of extra durable resin, never dreaming, I'm sure, that some day little Rene from the Honduras, would find hope and joy in playing with it. Renee especially enjoyed the cows and the rams with their horns, but then when I came over to see him, he looked at the cross I was wearing, and he shyly reached for the baby in the manger.

"Niño santo," he said.

I speak almost no Spanish, but that much I know. *"Niño santo,"* I repeated. *Holy Child.* The word made flesh who links us, old lady pastor, little refugee Christian.

What's God good for?

He's good for getting inside of us,

And talking *us* into becoming living breathing words of God's favor upon this broken world. And so, God's Word is fulfilled again today, in *our* hearing because of Jesus our Savior. AMEN.