



## Lenten Sermon Two

### The Spirit Anointed Christ for Mercy – Lenten Worship Series

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*The Spirit Anointed Christ ... to Preach Good News to the Poor.*

*Based on Luke 4:18-19*

It was one of those “ah-ha” moments in life when your whole world view changes and nothing is ever the same. My next door neighbor was a few years older than me and something of a hero to all of us boys. While we were usually dirty, unkempt, and wore the same clothes over and over he was always neat and clean. Everything about him exuded confidence. One fall day when we asked him to play baseball he refused because he was going to dig up all the wild roses in his front yard and prepare flower beds for his mother for next spring. Now if you know anything about wild roses, you know what a difficult thing he was doing. We thought he was being punished and forced to do this chore, but he said he was doing it because he wanted to. Here is the “ah-ha” moment. He said, “Every morning I get up and I put on clean clothes. I go downstairs and breakfast is ready. I gather up school supplies and go to school and come home and play baseball or basketball, I go to bed in a nice house, and I didn’t do anything. I don’t buy food, clothes, shoes, toys, or anything. I live in a great house and my parents work all the time to give me those things and it is time I start giving back something.” Something of a revolution happened because of that little speech. Suddenly lawns started getting mowed without parent’s yelling, and coal was shoveled into bins without anyone being told to do it. I would like to say it lasted for all of us, but most of my friends went back to being the selfish brutes they always were.

For me, the change was a bit more profound. My neighbor’s speech coincided with our confirmation class discussion of the First Article of the Apostle’s Creed. [**At this point turn to LSB 322 and have the congregation read along.**] It was an “ah-ha” moment because the stark realization came to me that I was absolutely dependent upon God for everything including salvation. I was like a beggar, but a beggar too stupid to realize the things I needed to beg for and too prideful to admit the things I should beg for were given to me freely. I believe that was the point I decided to become a pastor. If God loved me that much, I had to, as my friend said, “start giving something back.”

Like my neighbor, whose parents did not need to ask for his help, I felt the need to “do something” even though God doesn’t need my paltry offerings. Even though my parents gave me everything, I, of myself and by myself was poor. In my life with God, I by myself, am poor. I have nothing that I have not been given. I cannot by my own reason or strength even believe in Christ or come to Him. I am that poor.

When Martin Luther died, a piece of paper was found in his pocket. It read, “Let no one suppose that he has tasted the Holy Scriptures sufficiently unless he has ruled over the churches with the prophets for a hundred years ... We are beggars. That is true.” I don’t know what he was referring to but the sentiment is what I felt so long ago after the conversation with my neighbor and confirmation instruction. I am a beggar, it is true. Everything in my life – from the good *First Article* gifts I get, to my salvation, to my being kept in the faith – is a gift. I simply receive.

That is what Jesus means when He talks about “the poor.” They are those who realize they are beggars. As one of our Lutheran professors has written, “This is not the poverty against which the will rebels but under which the will bows in deep submission. It is more than just a state or condition, it is also an attitude of the soul toward God, that attitude that grows out of the profound realization of utter helplessness and beggary as far as any ability or possession of self are concerned. These wretched beggars bring absolutely nothing to God but their complete emptiness and need and stoop in the dust for pure grace and mercy only. This is the condition and the attitude of true contrition for which the Baptist worked, on which Jesus insisted, and which alone opens the heart for the grace of the Gospel so that Jesus says of such “poor in spirit” that theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>1</sup> The Gospel is meant for the poor and only the poor or as Rev. Harrison says, “(Christ) came specifically for beggars, and only for beggars.”<sup>2</sup>

All these beggars are appointed in Christ the King to be members of His kingdom. When we recognize how poor we are and how Christ gave us His riches, we are compelled to do something. His love compels us to make the aim of our life membership in His kingdom and aiding our neighbor in coming into the Kingdom, too. Jesus as our Prophet preaches us into the Kingdom through the Gospel as the Spirit enlightens us with His gifts (**read together the 3<sup>rd</sup> Article, LSB 323**). He was anointed to preach Good News to the poor.

Now here is a problem that I have had for years as a pastor and as a member of the Kingdom myself: the need to make all of this spiritual. Christ came to preach Good News to the poor; all of us are beggarly poor **in spirit**. We say the Spirit Anointed Christ came to heal the broken hearted; all of us, when confronted with the Law, are broken-hearted **spiritually**. We say that Christ came to preach deliverance to captives; all of us are captive to the devil by our sin and **so spiritually** we are prisoners. We say the Spirit Anointed Christ came to recover the sight of the blind; we are all by nature **spiritually blind**, dead, and God’s enemies. We say the Anointed Christ came to free the bruised; the bruises are the result of our **spiritual enmity** with God. We say that Christ came to proclaim the jubilee; that means the **spiritual** favor we have with God is because of the doing and the dying of Jesus. So we spiritualize everything to the point that it has become commonplace to hear people say faith is a personal thing. Religion is a private matter. Believe what you want but don’t let it leak into the “real world.” Never forget that Jesus was anointed in the real world and born in a stable with real animals and all the things that come with that. He grew up in a real world with real people, some who really loved Him and some who really wanted Him dead. He was a political refugee. He died on a real cross, was pegged there with real nails, and had a real spear thrust into a very real and human chest. We dare not spiritualize that, or anything else Jesus did. He cared about a real world of real people. He suffered with them and had compassion on them.

Let’s be as clear about this as we can – Jesus did not come to eliminate poverty. He says, “The poor you will always have with you.” But as one of our politicians said, “that is descriptive, not proscriptive.” When I realize that I am a beggar, that all I have comes from God, and that I have been rescued by the suffering and death of Christ to be a member of His kingdom, then I want to do something. I want to imitate the life of my anointed King and save the lives of as many as I can, so they too can come into the Kingdom. So the real life beggar, the real life person living in destitution, the real poor person wherever I see them, are for me **a sign of what we all are spiritually**. A real homeless, hungry person is a sign of what we all are

1 Richard Lenski *Commentary on Luke’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1946) 250

2 Harrison op cite 101

spiritually. Because of what my anointed Prophet has preached to me in the Gospel; because of what my anointed Priest did when He sacrificed His life for me, and because of what my King Jesus did when He brought me into the Kingdom, **I now become a sign to everyone else of what the Kingdom means in the real world.**

When the disciples told Jesus to send the hungry away Jesus, He said, “you feed them.” He never turns down the poor who come to Him for help. His ministry is to the entire person, body and soul, physical and spiritual.

When Jesus fed the poor and needy or healed the sick it was not a gimmick to get people to pay attention to Him. Otherwise, why would He tell His disciples to do the same? When Jesus fed the poor and needy or healed the sick, it was not to prove that He was the Messiah. Otherwise, why give His disciples the power to do the same?

When Jesus feeds the poor and needy or heals the sick He does it because that is what He is: life, health, salvation, food, and all the good things that a gracious God wants us to have. The miracles and merciful works of Jesus do not prove what He is; they are what He is. When our merciful anointed one shed His blood and died on the cross it was to redeem us physically as well as spiritually. We are redeemed, body and soul.

As a member of His kingdom, a blood-bought child of the King, the whole ordering of my life should be service in that Kingdom. I want to do everything that I can to help others come into the Kingdom, and anything that might be a hindrance to that end (such as poverty) I need to try and help alleviate. Because the kingdom of Christ is a kingdom of love, then I must put at its service my whole self and all that I have.<sup>3</sup> When I do that, I become a sign to others of the kingdom of God. I have become Christ to others. We said it last week and we will probably say it again: “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, 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, He 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 to freely 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.”<sup>4</sup>

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich,” says Paul in 2 Cor 8:9. Jesus became beggarly poor in Spirit to the point that He cried out, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me!” That’s about as poor as you can get, and He did it so that you don’t have to. Thank and praise Him for that by taking the riches He has given you and sharing them for His sake and in His name. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> for this section I am indebted to pages 57 through 63 of Johann Uhlhorn *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*, (New York, Scribners) 1883

<sup>4</sup> AE 31;367-68