



Today!

FIRST UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH

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It is fascinating to see how many times Jesus speaks the word “today” in the Gospels.

The words “now,” “today” and “this day” help us realize that God is at work in this moment.

Thus, it isn’t surprising that when Jesus spoke at his home synagogue near the beginning of Luke, he says,
“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Obviously the scripture Jesus quoted from Isaiah, which Brent preached from last week, was not totally fulfilled. Listen again:

¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; and has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰And Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹He began to say to them,
“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

People were still hungry, the nation was still subject to Rome. Oppressed were not totally free. Why did Jesus say “Today this scripture is fulfilled..”?

My guess is Jesus uses the word “today” to let us know that God is not waiting for some far off time when things will be perfect. God is fully active right here, right now. Our today is fully linked with what has been and with what will be.

We are the ones who create time. For God all is “Now.” We are the ones who try to pretend faith is about getting into heaven. Jesus says heaven is today.

Dr. Bob Jewett will be giving the Mattingly Lecture here on February 19. He said something very profound: The phrase “Give us this day our daily bread” means “Give us today the bread we need for tomorrow.”

Tillich used the phrase “eternal now.” Jesus said it simpler: “Today...”
We live “in God’s eternal now.” We are part of God’s wonderful eternal today.

A calm, warm-hearted organizer and go-to person on NWU’s campus, Mary Swinton, has a wonderful plaque on her desk. It says:

Today’s crisis is tomorrow’s joke.

We live in a time when people create a crisis at the drop of a hat. Over-reacting happens all the time, with people actually saying things like. “If you don’t agree with me that this is a crisis, then you obviously don’t care.”

I love being with children. They get the now-ness of reality. What is happening now has total attention. Each moment is a “now moment.”

My 3-year-old nephew, Jayvyn is a “now” person. He struggles with goodbyes. “See you soon” is not something he wants to hear. He does want a goodbye hug. He comes running. Then he turns around on his way so the hug doesn’t have to be face-to-face. He understands the power of “now.” Watching him I understand the fact that we “live in God’s today.”

“Today is a gift. That is why we call it “the Present.”

Sometimes we talk about “in God’s own time” as if God moves more slowly than we like. Truth is we are always playing catch-up up with God, who is way ahead of us. God’s “today” includes what will be, and all that has been.

If you want some motivational advice on how to make the most of today, there are plenty of places you can go. Shelves of books and multiple websites are filled with tips and skills you can hone.

The message of the Gospel is simple: God's purposes are fulfilled **today**. We live in an Eternal Now with the one who is Alpha and Omega. *Rev. 21:6*

We have many ways to serve which are part of our **"Today"** in Jesus Christ. Every act of service, every act of change is part of our **"today"** faith.

Today, as we come to Christ's Table, please know this table links you with all the todays in what we call the past and the future. In God's love they are simply **"today."** Maybe the words of the Broadway musical *Rent* will help:

There is no future, there is no past.

Thank God this moment's not the last.

There's only us. There's only this. Forget regret-- or life is yours to miss.

No other road. No other way. No day but today.

Or you can simply pray the prayer Jesus taught us: **Give us today our daily bread...** Keep us in your "now!"

We will hear the choir sing the African America spiritual *Were you there...* which is a profound way slaves in the field linked themselves and us and our here-and-now with Jesus' supreme act of self-giving love. Were you there?

At the end of worship we'll sing one of our congregation's favorite hymns It links all of others' and our efforts to join God in creating justice and the Kin-dom with **today**: **"grant us wisdom, courage for the facing of this hour."**

Do you remember the movie *Groundhog Day*? Bill Murray is Phil Connors, a self-absorbed **Pittsburgh** TV weatherman who hated having to cover **Groundhog Day** in **Punxsutawney**. He finds himself in a **time loop**, re-living the same day again and again. After indulging himself, he begins to re-examine his life.

**Thanks be to God, we are not stuck in "Groundhog Day. "
Instead we are living in "God's Eternal Now" that links
what is going on in the ordinary today moments of our lives
with all that has been and all that will be.**

Above all, remember that there are some things we must do **today**:

Love. Our second Scripture today has a powerful context. Paul writes to people that would rather be right than learn to do what they do in love:

He makes it clear: there is nothing without love. **Love owns today!**

We use Paul's words at weddings and funerals. They comfort and guide us. He did not write them to be pious inspiration. They are a **challenge** to the early Christians in Corinth (and **us today**) to get our behavior on course.

Without a doubt the first time they were read these words weren't greeted with smiles and warm fuzzies, but gasps and maybe even anger:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels,
but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

²If I have prophetic powers,

and understand all mysteries and all knowledge,

and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains,

but do not have love, I am nothing.

³If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body

so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful

or arrogant ⁵or rude.

Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

⁶Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things,

endures all things. ⁸Love never ends.

Luke 19.9: Jesus ...said to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham.

Luke 23.43: He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

This is My Prayer in the Desert

Verse 1: This is my prayer in the desert
When all that's within me feels dry
This is my prayer in my hunger and need
My God is a God who provides

Verse 2: And this is my prayer in the fire
In weakness or trial or pain
There is a faith proved
Of more worth than gold
So refine me Lord through the flames

Chorus: And I will bring praise
I will bring praise
No weapon formed against me shall remain

I will rejoice. I will declare.
God is my victory and God is here.

Verse 3: And this is my prayer in the battle
When triumph is still on its way
I am a conqueror and co-heir with Christ
So firm on His promise I'll stand

Bridge: All of my life, In every season, You are still God;
I have a reason to sing. I have a reason to worship

Verse 4: This is my prayer in the harvest
When favor and providence flow
I know I'm filled to be emptied again
The seed I've received I will sow

All of my life
In every season
You are still God
I have a reason to sing
I have a reason to worship

Prayers of the Faithful:

Holy God, may our Worship and our Communion with you and with each other help us see how much of your purpose is being fulfilled today, right now. May your love, which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things, take root and grow in us until we have no room for pettiness, trivialities, and strife,
We pray to you, God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For all who serve your people, O Christ, and especially those who serve you in places torn by violence or religious strife.
We pray to you, God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For those who feel exiled from your Church, and struggle to find a smooth path by which they can come home, help us to live lives that show your love and in so doing help us enable them to find their path home to your Church and your all-embracing arms.
God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For those who need to feel your healing power, especially Kathy who will have surgery this week, for Ben, and for those who have had surgery and procedures and are awaiting results.
We pray to you, God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

For all who have died, including Curtis Moeller's grandmother Allene, and for all anywhere who are ill or who grieve.

Give us so deep a faith that in all times and in all places we may without fear commit those we love and ourselves to your constant love and care.
We pray to you, God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer.**

- Pastor Larry gathers concerns. Then we gather joys -

Finally, we ask that you help us see how your purposes are being fulfilled today –
Help us not to merely see your Goodness and Extravagance, but to participate in it, following your Son, and guided by the Holy Spirit.
God in your mercy, **Hear our Prayer.**

OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE—JEREMIAH 1:4-10

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

⁶Then I said, “Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.”

⁷But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you.

⁸Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”

⁹Then the Lord put out a hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me,

“Now I have put my words in your mouth.

¹⁰See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”

EPISTLE SCRIPTURE--I CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love,

I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

²If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge,

and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

³If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude.

Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

⁶Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸Love never ends.

As for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease;

as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

⁹For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part;

¹⁰but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

¹¹When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child;

when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

¹²For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

¹³**And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.**

GOSPEL SCRIPTURE—LUKE 4: 21-24

Then Jesus began to say to them,

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

²²All spoke well of him

and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” ²³He said to them,

“Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’

And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’”

²⁴And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.”