

Not Just About Me; Everyone

C-Epiphany 3: Luke 4:14-21; 1/27/2019

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Children's Sermon:

Our Gospel reading this morning is about a sermon Jesus preached at a church (or what they called synagogues) in his hometown, Nazareth, where he grew up. Jesus had been traveling all around Galilee, which is kind of like a state, (not as big as Texas). But this was the first time he ever preached in his hometown.

As he traveled around Galilee, Jesus, had been reaching out to help and serve the poor and needy and the sick. And at the beginning of his sermon in his hometown, Jesus wanted to share something the prophet Isaiah had written, which was in the Bible and he found it.

Isaiah basically said, God has sent me, **“to bring good news to the poor.”** What do you think Isaiah meant by bringing “good news to the poor”? To help them find ways to overcome the challenges of not having any money or food or a home?

Then Isaiah said, God has also sent me **“to proclaim release to the captives.”** What does it mean to “release the captives”? Help people get out of prison? Or help people being excluded from opportunities?

And then Isaiah said, God has sent me **to bring “recovery of sight to the blind.”** What does that mean? To try to help people who can't see, or hear, or walk?

And finally Isaiah says God sent me to **“let the oppressed go free.”** What does that mean? To help out the people who are not being treated fairly to have a better life?

And then Jesus sat down after reading these words from Isaiah, and basically told his hometown people, “these are the things I have been doing. And, these are the things **you** also should be doing.” Jesus says, like Isaiah said in the Old Testament, we should all help the people that are struggling or having problems.

What would it look like if you tried to help people who were struggling or having big problems? What if you tried to follow Jesus' example, with your family, or your neighbors, or your classmates in school? What might you be able to do to help your brother or sister or neighbors or classmates overcome difficult issues that are causing them to suffer? How could you follow the example of Jesus?

That's one of the main reasons we all come to Church – to learn to follow Jesus example and learn how to love and support each other, and to find ways to love and support our friends and our neighbors.

So what do you think you could do to follow Jesus' example and Isaiah's example?

Adult Sermon:

Our Gospel reading this morning seems pretty simple and straightforward. Jesus says, preaching to his hometown of Nazareth for the first time, there are things I'm called by God to do; things I've been teaching my disciples to do. And, these are the things God, and the prophet Isaiah, are calling **all of us** to do: bring good news to the poor; proclaim release to the captives; bring recovery of sight to the blind; let the oppressed go free.

Jesus didn't say, in his first sermon in his hometown: "Guess what – I'm the **Messiah**. Believe in me. Your sins will be forgiven, and you will get a ticket to Heaven. I've come as your Messiah to save you from Hell."

Instead he said, "Listen to the prophet Isaiah. Listen to the ways he is challenging us to follow God's Way – Love our neighbors, especially those who are suffering.

Jesus is our **Savior**. Jesus does show us the Way to eternal life, the Way to connect with our God, forever. But it seems to me, part of the Way, maybe a big part of the Way, is realizing, that if we really **love** God and **love** Christ, and we truly "**believe**" in them, we should also feel called and committed to loving the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed.

From my perspective, this is one of the ways Christianity is so distorted in our world and especially in our country. It is so much easier, and so much simpler, to just "**believe** in Jesus as our Savior," so we can go to Heaven. That's so much easier than actually following the Jesus Way, of serving and loving our friends, family & neighbors.

It is not simple; and it will never be simple to follow **the Jesus Way**. Trying to figure out how to reach out to and help people who are suffering in our world is very complicated and sometimes even divisive. That's one of the reasons many Churches are reluctant to take on social justice issues. If you read the verses which follow our Gospel in Luke, chapter 4, you will discover that the people of Jesus' hometown synagogue, became very skeptical and critical of Jesus, because they had seen him grow up as a kid in Nazareth and become a carpenter. Then Jesus says to them, "it's normal for a prophet **not** to be accepted in his hometown." And then Jesus and his hometown neighbors got in a big argument, and ultimately, they tried to throw him off a cliff.

Here's an example in our world: Our recent Government shut down, and our controversy over building a wall on our border to keep out immigrants. So many government workers, because of the shut down received no pay in over a month. And there's a big risk that in 3 weeks, their salaries may be taken away again. And most of them do not have big salaries, and lots of savings.

I'm sure we are not all on the same page on how to resolve this issue. So should we not talk about it in Church? Should we ignore the people who are suffering because of the shut down?

That's part of the gift of our diversity at Rec. If we are truly going to be a diverse faith community, we have to be able to **agree to disagree**. Some of us will be passionate about immigration issues, like my sons. And some of us will see this issue as complicated and potentially disruptive for our Country. We want to be a very diverse faith community, with people from all generations and from many different backgrounds. That gives us the opportunity to listen to each other, learn from each other, so we can all begin to see the world from a much wider and wiser perspective. And if we are truly open and transparent, we will **never** all be on the same page. There will always be issues we disagree on.

I have learned so much at Rec because I've been able to listen to a very diverse community. One example is our 12 Step groups. Before I came to Rec, I had never heard of a church that openly welcomed 12 Steppers, and I did not see a connection between 12 Steppers and the Church. I had never read the 12 Steps or realized how deeply spiritual the 12 Step journey is, until I came to Rec.

That's just one of the many ways I've been stretched here at Rec. If I had stuck to my old beliefs, we would never have had a 12 Step Second Sunday service.

[By the way, we are in the process of setting up another "2nd Sunday" in which we will weave the spiritual 12 Steps into our Sunday liturgy.]

So, when we face a **controversial issue**, do we slam the door and walk away because we strongly disagree? Or do we say, "I see this issue differently, but I'm willing to listen to you. And I encourage you to do what you feel God is calling you to do, even if I disagree."

The more we accept diversity, the more we will all be able to stretch and grow and become even more welcoming and inclusive, like Jesus modeled.

That's what Reconciliation is about. That's our DNA, to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible. To do our best to truly follow the sometimes **controversial** Jesus Way.

Amen.