

Sermon text for Sunday, January 30, 2022

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The Gospel for today picks up where last Sunday's Gospel left off, and is part of the same story.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

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

Some scholars call these words of the Prophet Isaiah "Jesus Mission Statement." Jesus Mission Statement. "It's a bit sad that we even have to translate Christ and Isaiah's words in corporate and organizational lingo to better understand it. If it was Jesus' "mission statement," should it not be ours as followers of Christ?

The scripture continues: "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

All spoke well of him until he obliquely suggested that they too, held some responsibility, as they too could play some part in the relieving of their neighbor's suffering.

When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Something was missing. The wise crafters of the lectionary cycle got it right. What was missing was love, deep deep love from within.

Today we hear a passage we have long heard in the context of weddings, so we think of it in terms of romantic love, and it is that. But it is far deeper than romance. It cuts to the core of we are are.:

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. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to

remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If 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.

Love. It all begins with love.

Priest and Christian author and contemplative Richard Rohr tells a story about the late Brazillian archbishop Don Helder Camara:

He once said: When I give food to the poor. They call me a saint, when I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist..

Dom Camera understood why the townspeople were ready to throw Jesus off a cliff.

Toward the end of the evening, at a retreat at the Center for Action and Contemplation, outside of Albuquerque, New Mexico the Archbishop said, “If you will live your religion, you will become different.” He gave a gleeful little laugh, as though that idea thoroughly delighted him. He went on to challenge each of us. Remarking that we were on a countdown to the beginning of the third millennium, he suggested we use these next nine years to live as we say we believe, acknowledging God everywhere, living from that place within each of us where God dwells. It was a call to be courageous and faithful. To be who we are meant to be. [1]

This occurred just a couple weeks before the beginning of the bombing of Iraq in 1991.

That’s all pretty heavy, but I leave that with you that you might ponder what that means in your heart.

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On a much lighter note, today is the 67 annual meeting of the St. Mary’s.

Often I share sort of a state of the church message at this time. Today, after almost twenty three months of pandemic, I am going to fall back on an old adage. A picture is worth a thousand words.

Despite all the hardships, shutdowns, and physical separation and dislocations, the work and ministry of St Mary’s continued, and adapted in new ways.

Underneath it all, I believe is love. Love. Love for God, respect and love for God’s creation, Love of the God-given gift of life itself. Love for neighbor and stranger alike, who, after all, are one and the same. And love for self: a healthy respect that we are made in God’s image, bearers of Christ Jesus in this world. Love, celebration of the Good News of God in Christ Jesus, and more love.

As they use to say... George, roll the tape: (Video of St. Mary’s life together through 2022. )