

Epiphany 3C  
Church of the Messiah  
The Rev. Emily E. Given

*May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength, and our Redeemer. Amen.*

At times, the scripture passages we are given on Sunday morning feel like we are coming to the middle of the story. As if somehow we have missed a key part. And in the case of this morning, it's true. Two weeks ago, we found ourselves in the Gospel of Luke at the time of Jesus' baptism. And this morning, Luke has Jesus in the middle of the Synagogue preaching and teaching.

What did we miss? Jesus went out into the desert for 40 days. Praying and fasting, yes, but more notably, be tested. Being tempted by a presence that invited Jesus to take the easy route, to opt for the self-interested way. "Turn this stone into bread... Throw yourself down from this high place and angels will catch you... Look out over the whole

world and know that it can all be yours.” The offers were of endless wealth, unbridled power, and ultimate authority.

Each time Jesus confirmed his role as the son of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit. He knew the source of authority did not lay in human hands or even in his alone. His answer each time was “No, I know who I am. I know where the real power lies.

*(Now, keep in mind this was no small thing... Jesus was human... and I bet he was “hangry”!)*

Today, we see a bold Jesus standing in the midst of the synagogue. And again, He is not confused about who he is. With each phrase of the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, I can imagine him placing an emphasis on the word “Me”

The Spirit of the Lord is upon ME...

God has anointed ME...

God has sent ME...

To do what?

Bring good news to the poor.

Release prisoners.

Give sight to the blind.

Let the oppressed go free.

Proclaim the year of the Lord's Favor.... Otherwise known as Jubilee. This is a custom we don't practice in our culture. But the meaning is that every fifty years, debts were forgiven, those who were enslaved were set free, and property was returned to its original owners. God's economy is so different than our modern business and social dealings.

Maybe that is why it caused so much social commentary when Marianne Edgar Budde, the Episcopal Bishop of Washington, reminded us of the ways of Jesus this week. How her call for unity and mercy sparked debate, because we have forgotten the call of Jesus, is "to love all, serve all, and create no sorrow", to quote one of my favorite musicians, Trevor Hall.

The call to love God, love self, and love neighbor.

The message from Nehemiah this morning speaks of how important it is to engage scripture together. There is wisdom and direction there. Old texts take on new meaning when Jesus stands in our midst as the fulfillment just like he did in the synagogue saying...

The Spirit of the Lord is upon ME...

God has anointed ME...

God has sent ME...

We have a liberating God. New meaning is found in Scripture because God is still speaking. While it is important to understand the original context and not use it for our own purposes against one another. It is important to say, "What now?" and how.

I believe something powerful happens when we gather. The image of the body in Paul's Letter to the people living in Corinth is too quickly dismissed. Yes, yes, yes, we need all the parts to make the whole. Let's not hurry past this image. We DO need all the parts to be whole. We are a body. Not just any body... the body of Christ.

The statement that stirred my soul the most in Bishop Budde's sermon this week was, "we have gathered for unity ... not agreement... a type of unity that fosters community across diversity and division... a unity that serves the common good."

I believe this is the body of which Paul speaks. How we can live in unity even when we don't agree.

We come together here to be re-formed. The world stretches us out of shape. Gathering each week puts us back together. We are re-membered.

As I mentioned in the Saturday letter, the star word given to me this year is "unity." At first, I wasn't sure how that would play out in our life together as a church, but it feels apparent now, as I watch the varied responses to the bishop's sermon. In the letter yesterday I articulated my sense of call during this time. It is my call but also my promise to you. I will say them again because I don't think they can be spoken too often.

My call and my promise is to stand in the middle of all the messages and keep the words of Jesus most central in our common life.

My call and my promise is to remind us that our most valuable identity is our citizenship as beloved children of God.

My call and my promise is to love unconditionally so that Christ's love can be realized in our world.

My call and my promise is to remind us of the blessed unity we have in Jesus. This unity lives in a place that is far beyond any way we can imagine the possible divisions among us.

My call and my promise is to hold us together based on something deeper than passing political seasons. There is something everlasting about the promises we have in Christ.

My call is to love. My prayer is that you will join me in this common call.

Because I believe The Spirit of the Lord is upon US...

God has anointed US... and...

God has sent US... "for such a time as this."

Amen.