



Sermon

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January 27, 2019

“Jesus’ Politics”

In our story today, Jesus has just come from the wilderness in which He experienced the temptation by Satan. With the fullness of the Spirit, He is returning to home. Jesus returned to Galilee and to the comfort of His home, Nazareth. Like the good, faithful Jew that He was, He went to the Synagogue on a Saturday morning. The leadership of the synagogue fell to the elders of the congregation. The custom of the day was for the elder to select someone to read the lessons and to teach. He chose Jesus. Jesus took the scroll, and selected the passage from Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to
Proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim
Liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set
At liberty, those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s
favor.”

Then He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. All of the eyes of those in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And then He said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

This passage of Scripture is considered to be Jesus’ Inaugural Address. This was His way of introducing his policies to the world. This was setting the Stage for His actions to follow. This was good news for the people. They praised Him!

In my preparation for this morning, I came across a poem by the late Howard Thurman, a minister, civil rights leader and a mentor to MLK. It is titled, “The Work of Christmas”:

When the song of the angel is still
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the Kings and princes are home
When the Shepherds are back with their flock
Then the work of Christmas begins: to find the lost, to heal
The broken, to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nation, to bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.”

This brief poem describes the character of Jesus’s ministry. He is establishing his priorities and the direction of His work. He is casting His vision for the reordering of relationships--good news to the poor, release to the captive, sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, all, declaring God’s favor.

From here on out, everything Jesus does will be grounded in the politics of good news, release, sight, freedom and divine favor. His politics is revealed in healing the sick, feeding the hungry, raising the dead. At the very heart of Jesus’s politics is an unspoken and yet ever-present question: where does it hurt? That is the question that drives and directs Jesus’s life and ministry. As Jesus will later say “those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Luke 5:31)

What if we began our conversations with “where does it hurt”? What if we let that question establish our priorities and guide our decisions? Greater compassion and kindness would replace resolving issues, fix problems. We would listen more than we speak. Power would look like cooperation and collaboration. We would have the courage and will to stand with another in his or her pain. We would open rather than close places, people and ourselves to His divine favor and submit to His calling on our lives.

Luke’s gospel stories focused on the heart of God for the lost clearly indicates His desire to nurture the same heart among communities of disciples. The church that takes Luke’s words to heart will be a community of mercy and love, actively seeking the restoration of fallen people, reflecting the character of the God who called the community together. Luke gives his successors, namely contemporary Christian leaders, the

ongoing task of building up the sort of community that can become a place for the healing of the broken. Only as individual church members are convinced of this truth, to this vision of God's, and who seek and help save the lost, who heals the brokenhearted, who feeds the hungry, will a church fulfill the calling of God.

One of the barriers to achieving this end is our tendency within the church to mask our own fallenness and brokenness, to put on our best face at church and fail to trust one another to help us seek God's full restoration of our own lives. A church community cannot respond to someone who would work through serious hurt or pain by suggesting that such feelings are out of place. Only as a church takes on the character of a "Sinners Anonymous" group, will we see transformation. When a church responds to the hurt and pain that we the broken experience, the church will become a haven for all who seek to be transformed. And where those who have never encountered God's heart may find not condemnation, but love, restoration and freedom from a harmful way of life lived apart from God.

Luke seeks to nurture a community that values and invests itself not only in facilitating the restoration of the sinner and the lost but also in the liberation of those bound by cycles of poverty or oppressed in any way. We cannot be whole until we become sensitive and responsive to the needs of our destitute brothers and sisters.

In our epistle reading today Paul says, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit but as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body that there be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

God has called each one of us to be a member of His body, the Church. Each one of us brings unique individual talents to His table. There need not be division among the members of the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. To identify our individual talents or gifts, we must open our hearts to Him, who directs and protects us. All you who hear, listen for His call just this past

week, there were two friends of mine who shared their stories with me. Mary shared with me that prior to her nursing career, she had worked as a bartender at Sharky's for years. She wanted another work path and felt the call to the nursing profession. Her gifts of compassion, positivism, patience, all contributed to the gift of healing.

Another friend, Sally, shared with a few of us at mealtime, that prior to her call to Ministry, she had worked for a hospital in the billing and collection department. Her job was to call people to ask them to pay their bill! Someone actually told her, "Oh, I am going to pray for you, it sounds like you have a terrible job!" She realized that the job she had was in conflict with a role in Ministry, so she felt the call to full-time seminary courses to prepare her for her full-time role in Ministry. These were just a few conversations I had this week, so when we open our hearts to others, we learn more about the gifts that are given to people which enable people to work as One Body.

Rev. Thurman said "don't ask what the world needs, ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come, "Alive"! I challenge all of us to come alive in our Christian walk, to listen when the world is noisy; to see when it is dark; to feel the pain of others when there is hurt; to feed the lost, the downtrodden, the unemployed and the homeless. Jesus did and does all of this as He models Christian behavior for us, as we remember that at the very heart of Jesus's politics is an unspoken and yet ever-present question, we can ask one another, "Where does it hurt?"