

Third Weekend After Epiphany (RCL/C): "This Isn't Ancient History, People!"  
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21  
January 22-23, 2022  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Is there a centering prayer you say before you get out of bed in the morning or before you go to sleep at night? Mine change over time, and are often but not always snippets of Scripture. These days there's more than enough going on in the world to make me anxious, so currently before I get up I remember and recite this holy advice from St. Luke's Gospel:

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin, yet even Solomon in all his glory was not adorned like one of these. If God so clothes the grass of the field which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he care for you, oh you of little faith!" (Luke 12:27-28)

Anybody else willing to share a prayer or Scripture passage that's special to you?

It's a good guess that Isaiah 61 and Isaiah 58 were "go-to" passages for our Lord, ones He frequently visited. In today's Gospel He weaves the two of them together. I'm thinking Jesus held these verses close to His heart, because in them He found a great description of the mission His heavenly Father had sent Him on. He was telling His neighbors **then** who He really was, and He's telling us **now** who we really ought to be.

On that day in the Nazareth synagogue long ago, it was a novelty for these people to hear Jesus proclaim the Scripture and preach. He was the hometown boy whose reputation as a wonderworker was spreading like wildfire. According to St. Luke, the other congregants were riveted as Jesus read the Scripture aloud for them. (He was reading in Hebrew, and a worship assistant would have been translating into Aramaic.)

*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." (Luke 4:20-21)*

Maybe He wanted to shout, "This isn't ancient history, people! We're **making** history here today!" The living Word of God had just read the written Word of God to them. The Word made flesh had just told them why He had come and what He was going to do: bring hope to the hopeless, free the captives, restore sight to the blind, liberate the oppressed. Initially His audience was happy to hear it:

*All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. (Luke 4:22)*

But the next part of the story that we don't hear this weekend is Jesus commenting "...no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown" (Luke 4:24). Then He lays out God's track record of blessing Gentiles. His former neighbors aren't happy with Him anymore.

*<sup>28</sup> When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way. (Luke 4:28-30)*

Part of God's plan is to bless people **these** people don't approve of. It's still true: God casts a really wide net to gather all God's children into the divine embrace. God's grace is inclusive, not exclusive. By God's grace cozy little communities are going to grow. There will be so many newcomers it won't be as easy to recognize faces and remember names. The people who come have gifts to share, as we heard in the lesson from 1 Corinthians, but they also have needs to be met. **Growing the Kingdom is work, loving labor** that requires devotion, flexibility, good sense **as well as** a good sense of humor, wisdom and a willingness not to cost the cost. We grow the Kingdom riding side by side, not as Lone Rangers. We need everyone's spiritual gifts: those of the cradle Lutherans among us, those

who have come from different denominations or other faiths, and those who have come to faith for the first time as adults.

We have to realize there are many ways to invite and welcome those who aren't here yet. We have to remind ourselves that "My way or the highway" isn't really a philosophy the Lord loves ☺. We're wise to embrace the wisdom of our Moravian brothers and sisters who strive for:

- Unity in necessary things.
- Freedom in nonessential things.
- Charity (love) in all things.

2022 is Holy Trinity's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. Our formal celebration kicks off in the fall and will continue through the '22-'23 program year, but we began preparing with our capital campaign a number of years ago. The name of that very successful campaign and the special fund associated with it is "20/20 Vision for 2022." We have been gathering seed money to help us celebrate the past 100 years of ministry and even more importantly to sow new seeds for present and future ministries. Let's all prayerfully consider how our Lord Jesus would like the good news that He proclaimed in His visit to His hometown synagogue to be proclaimed and lived out by us, in this place at this time. 2,000 years later the poor still look for good news, the captives and the oppressed still long for liberation, the physically and spiritually blind yearn for sight, and sinners dream of forgiveness. How shall we proclaim and enact the Good News that all of these are planks in the platform of the Kingdom of God? That God honors us by choosing us as players in the coming of the Kingdom? The Holy Spirit is shouting to us, "This isn't ancient history, people! We're **making** history here today!" Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham

