

Reflection for 23-24 January 2016
3rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year C
Mike Britton

Text: Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21.

“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”¹ That’s a breathtakingly bold statement, isn’t it? Do we hear it with feasting and joy, as the Israelites addressed by Ezra heard the Law in Jerusalem, having come back from their years of exile?

Spoiler alert: the people of Nazareth didn’t.²

Can we believe in the year of the Lord’s favour? Do the poor hear good news? Are captives and the oppressed free? It’s as tempting now as it was then to dismiss Jesus’ ringing declaration as empty rhetoric, and demand tangible proof. Jesus delivers, but as usual, not in the way everyone expects him to.

The Nazareth Manifesto, as it’s sometimes called, is Jesus’ declaration of his mission. Luke, in his “orderly account,”³ puts this declaration immediately after Jesus’ time of prayer and temptation in the wilderness, immediately following his baptism. Jesus dedicates the rest of his short life to teaching and living this word, proclaiming, freeing, and healing. After his death, he truly comes into his own, and expands the scope of his mission to include not only the few who met him in life, but everyone for all ages—us.

Initiation, confirmation, mission: it’s a path for us to follow. All of us who follow Jesus participate in the great work that God set. We each, as Paul writes, have gifts to contribute, and it is by working together as a community that we accomplish God’s plan, not only for others, but amongst ourselves:⁴ “Love one another” was Jesus’ new commandment; by that love are we to be known as followers of Christ.⁵

It’s the week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Let’s remain humble enough to recognize that God calls each person and every community by name. We are called to see Christ shining in each person; if we have eyes to see that, we can go beyond condescension to true solidarity.

Mission is the beginning of a journey: Jesus’ mission led him to crucifixion and through it to resurrection. We will need strength for that journey, if we are to see it through.⁶ It’s for this reason that we come together: to feed each other, to be bread and life for each other. Every Eucharist is an opportunity to share trust and joy in God, which Ezra says is the citadel of our strength.⁷ It’s not only in the Eucharist we celebrate within the Mass, but in the little ones we can find everywhere in our lives if we look, that we can find this regenerating joy.

Today, and every day, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing, if you have ears to hear it, eyes to see it, hands and feet to do it. You—we—are its fulfillment: sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed, good news to the poor. The Israelites long ago rejoiced at the restoration of the covenant of God's Law. We have even more cause to rejoice: Jesus' new covenant of God's overflowing joy and love.

¹ Luke 4:21

² Luke 4:22-30

³ Luke 1:3

⁴ 1 Corinthians 12:25-26

⁵ John 13:34-35

⁶ Cf. 1 Kings 19:1-8

⁷ Nehemiah 8:10