

“The Story I True”

Third Sunday After the Epiphany, January 24, 2010

May I speak only the truth and may only the truth be heard by you, in the name of God our Creator, our redeemer, and our sanctifier.

JESUS MAKING HISTORY

On a Saturday morning in Nazareth, the townspeople gathered in the synagogue to listen to Jesus read and teach.

No big surprise.

He was well known in the area.

It was his home town.

He had been raised there.

The townspeople wanted to hear what Jesus had to say.

He read from the “Isaiah scroll.”

These would’ve been words that everyone was familiar with.

The word of Isaiah:

God’s Spirit is on me.

He has chosen me to preach the message of good news to the poor.

He has sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind.

He has sent me to set free those who are burdened and battered.

He has sent me to announce that this is God’s year to act!

When Jesus read those words, everyone understood them to be the words of Isaiah.

This was how Isaiah had defined his mission.

When Jesus finished that reading, he handed the scroll back to the attendant and sat down in what was called the “Moses seat,” the place from which to teach.

THEIR REACTION

Every eye in the place was on him, intent, waiting to hear what he had to say.

What would he say about this great prophet, Isaiah?

Would he repeat Isaiah’s bad news, that historically had already played out, that Israel had sinned and would be taken into captivity by Babylonians?

Or would he emphasize the good news, already played out, that one day God would restore his people and bring them back from captivity.

Jesus did neither.

It was an unexpected twist.

It caught everyone off-guard that Saturday morning.

He didn’t emphasize the past, or the future.

He focused on the present.

He didn’t lift up Isaiah as the great role model.

He lifted himself up.

And this is the thing that upset everyone in that synagogue on that Saturday morning.

It’s why everyone was furious with him, and, in subsequent verses, which we didn’t hear this morning, in subsequent verses, they drove him out of town.

They were going to kill him.

He had dared to suggest that these memorable words of Isaiah were actually about himself.

“Today,” he had said to them, “this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

DID THIS REALLY HAPPEN?

You know, I don’t know whether this little bit of drama really took place.

Lots of very smart students of the Bible don’t think it did.

I expect they’re right.

It probably never happened.

Nonetheless, I think it’s True.

THE TRUTH

God’s Spirit was “on” Jesus when Jesus said we should care for the

poor.

God’s Spirit was “on” Jesus when he violated social and religious conventions and associated with lower class people, untouchables.

God’s Spirit was on Jesus when he said not to worry about what you wear or what you eat or what you drink.

God’s Spirit was on Jesus when he told us to turn the other cheek, when he spoke of kindness and generosity and loving your neighbor as yourself.

God’s Spirit was on Jesus when he spoke of caring for the marginalized, when he promoted compassion and peace, and sharing of God’s love extravagantly.

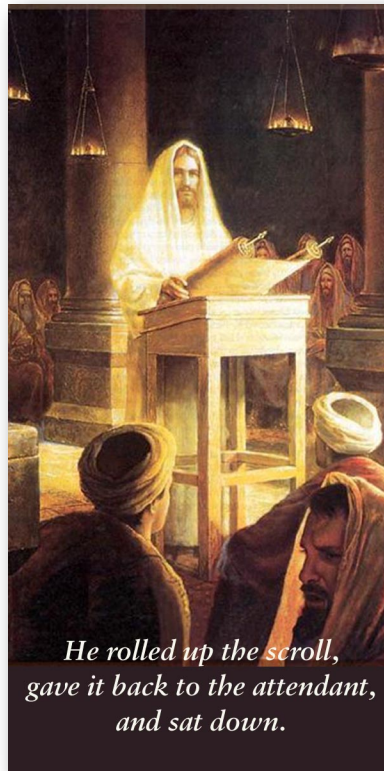
THE FRANCISCAN MONK AND MOTHER TERESA

There’s a story told about a Franciscan monk in Australia who was assigned to be the guide for Mother Teresa when she visited New South Wales.

He of course was thrilled at the prospect of being so close to such greatness.

He dreamed of how much he would learn from her.

He imagined what they would talk about.



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But during her visit, things didn't quite work out the way he had hoped.

Although he was constantly at her side during the visit, he never had the chance to say more than a word or two to her.

She was always surrounded by those she needed speak with.

Finally, when her tour was over, and she was due to fly to New Guinea, the monk got to speak to her.

"If I pay my own fare to New Guinea, can I sit next to you on the plane so we can talk and I can learn from you?"

Mother Teresa looked at him.

"You have enough money for airfare to New Guinea?"

"Yes," he replied eagerly.

"Then give that money to the poor," she said.

"You'll learn more from that than anything I can tell you."

Mother Teresa of course understood that Jesus' ministry was to the poor, and she had made it hers as well.

She knew that the poor, more than anyone else, needed what we have to offer.

PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

I think of myself as a "progressive Christian."

Not stuck in the past.

Wanting to articulate the faith and my expression of it in contemporary ways.

I have no intentions of rewriting Christianity.

But instead, for me, it's more about getting back to what Christianity should be, or maybe even was, at its core.

It's about getting back to a movement of kindness and generosity, acceptance and love.

It's about getting back to a movement of tolerance, and beauty, and peace.

These things are often thrown out of Christian churches today, in favor of intolerance, judgment, and sometimes even hate.

These things are often thrown out by those who wish to control other people's ways of thinking.

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I AM INCREDIBLY THANKFUL!

I am incredibly thankful to be a part of this little church in the mid-Hudson region of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, where we even respect the faithfulness of other people who have other names for the way to God's realm, and where we acknowledge that their ways are True, for them.

I am incredibly thankful to be part of this place where we invite all people to participate in our community and worship life without insisting that they become like us.

God's Spirit truly was on Jesus when he spoke of caring for the marginalized, promoting compassion and peace, and sharing God's love extravagantly.

The story is True.

"Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Jerry Brooks+

Prayer

Let us pray.

Eternal God, the Great Mystery that is outside everything and yet at the same time inside, keep alive in each one of us the search

for a faith that is real, a faith that helps us to live happier lives, a faith that gives us a fuller meaning to life and the events of life.

Bring us to know the goodness that flows from the heart of the universe and may we be expanded in heart and soul by that goodness.

This is our prayer.

Amen.

