



The reading from Luke this week is the first time we hear Jesus speak as he begins his ministry. “Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee.” He has been in the desert and now returns to preach and to teach; the people, we are told, are “amazed.” Luke wants us to know he is here driven by the Spirit. We learn that Jesus regularly read the scriptures in the synagogue, where he grew up, and when given the scrolls, he seeks a particular passage that spoke of “good news” to the poor from the prophet Isaiah, echoing Mary’s own song about the hungry being filled with good things. Perhaps Jesus speaks of the year of the Lord’s favor, a Jubilee year when debts are forgiven, land returned, and the servitude of bondage caused by debt and poverty reversed. But the power of his speaking and declaration that the moment is now when he brings good news, will get him chased out of town. The theme of the oppressed being freed will continue throughout the Gospel of Luke. As we continue in the season of Epiphany, we are encouraged to reflect on the Spirit that sends Jesus into the surrounding country to preach and teach and heal and also invited to pay attention that his healing and teaching literally set people free. This Jesus brings concrete changes to the lives and the communities around him.

The invitation that Paul extends in the letter to the Corinthians for all people to be included is thwarted by what appear to be major conflicts in the church. Paul reminds the people that all the parts are necessary, not one part is more important than another. It seems so familiar, and yet we constantly need to be reminded that together we make up the One Body in Christ.

But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. 1 Corinthians 12:24-25

In the new creation all of creation is filled with Christ and it is only by honoring all the parts that we are enabled to fully rejoice in the power of God’s Love. This an understanding that Paul sees as differing from the perspective of the world where there are parts and members that are more important than another.

Pastor Susan

Excerpt from draft of “Our God is Able, Martin Luther King, Jr.

...Let us notice finally that God is able to give us interior resources to confront the trials and difficulties of life. Each of us confronts circumstances in life which compel us to carry heavy burdens of sorrow, moments when jostling winds of adversity come with hurricane force and glowing sunrises are transformed into darkest nights. There are moments when our highest hopes are blasted and our noblest dreams are shattered. Christianity has never overlooked these experiences of disappointment. They will inevitably come. Like the rhythmic alternation in the natural order, life has its glittering daybreaks and its desolate midnight; {the glittering sunlight of its summers and the piercing chill of its winters,} its moment of unutterable joy and its moments of overwhelming sorrow. Like the everflowing waters of the river, life has its moments of flood and its (periods)of drought. When these dark (hours) of life emerge, many find themselves crying out with Paul Lawrence Dunbar:²³

A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in;
A minute to smile and an hour to weep in;
A pint of joy to a peck of trouble
And never a laugh (but the moans come double)
and that is Life.²⁵

Admitting that moments will inevitably come when the weight of problems and staggering disappointments will invade your {our} lives, Christianity goes on to affirm that God is able to give us the power to meet them. He is able to give us the inner equilibrium to stand up amid the trials and burdens of life. He is able to provide inner peace amid outer storms. This inner stability of the man of faith was Christ's chief legacy to his disciples. He left them with neither material resources nor a magical formula that would exempt them from suffering and persecution. But he left them an imperishable gift: "My peace I leave with thee." ...(John 14:27)... This is that peace which passeth all understanding.

We may feel at times that we don't need God, but then one day the storms of disappointment will begin to rage, the winds of disaster will begin to blow, and the tidal waves of grief will beat up against our lives, and if we don't have a deep and patient faith our emotional lives will be ripped to shreds. Now, this is why there is so much frustration in the world. We are relying on gods rather than God. For years we have genuflected before the god of science, only to find that it has given us the atomic bomb, producing fears and anxieties that science can never mitigate. We have worshipped the god of pleasure only to find that thrills play out and sensations are short-lived. We have bowed before the god of money only to find that there are things that money can't buy—love and friendship—and that in a world of possible depressions, stock market crashes, and bad business investments, money is a rather uncertain deity. No, these transitory gods are not able to save us or bring happiness to the human heart. Only God is able. It is faith in him that we must re-discover in this modern world. With this faith we can transform bleak and desolate valleys into sun-lit paths of joy and bring new light into the dark chambers of pessimism. Is someone here this morning moving toward the evening of life and afraid of that something called death? Why? God is able. Is someone here this morning all but on the brink of despair because of some grave disappointment?— the death of a loved one, the breaking of a marriage, the waywardness of a child. Why? God is able to give you the power to endure that which cannot be changed. Is someone here afraid of a bad health? Why? If it comes, God is able...

25. Dunbar, "Life" (1895)

Martin Luther King Jr., from the draft sermon July 1, 1962 to March 31, 1963? King Papers, "Our God is Able"
The Martin Luther King, Jr. , Research and Education Institute, Stanford.



This Sunday we will learn more about the Poor People's Campaign from Peg Miller.