

December 14, 2008  
Advent III  
Year B  
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11  
John 1:6-8, 19-28

In the name of the One who Calls us, Anoints us and Sends us.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me?

The Lord has anointed me?

God is sending me to do what? To ...

Bring good news to the oppressed? What news would that be?

Bind up the brokenhearted? How does anybody fix a broken heart?

Proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners? Do I have the authority to liberate all the inmates in the world?

Proclaim the year of the Lord's favor? What does that mean?

Comfort all who mourn? Everybody?

I don't think I can do all this. God must have made a mistake on this one. Surely I am not expected to do all of this stuff? I bet God was talking about Tom Ward – he's the senior warden – he can do anything!

Wait a minute, aren't these words from Isaiah the same words that Jesus speaks in the gospel of Luke when he goes to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth? Didn't he unroll the scroll and read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And then Jesus said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Yes, that's right. God was talking about Jesus doing all these things, not me or Tom. I'm glad that's cleared up!

But is it really just the responsibility of Jesus to address all these issues? Remember, Jesus just read these words, he didn't write them. The prophet Isaiah spoke these very words about himself 500 years or so before Jesus did. So does this mean that God only wanted two people to take care of all this – a prophet and a Messiah? But remember, Jesus was in his hometown, everybody knew him as the guy next door. He wasn't considered a prophet and people certainly didn't think of Jesus as the Son of God. They saw him as a normal man – a little quirky, maybe, but nonetheless an ordinary human being just like them. These people were taken aback because they focused solely on Jesus' impudence of identifying himself as the chosen one sent by God to fulfill the scriptural prophecy. They completely missed the part that Jesus, just like Isaiah, was taking up God's work in the world. After all isn't that what we are all called to do?

Who among us hasn't known somebody who has mourned? Didn't you listen to them and try to comfort them? And what about the family member or friend who experienced a breakup of a relationship and was heartbroken – weren't you there to walk with that

person as well? Or maybe you have been the person on the receiving end. Has someone comforted or consoled you? But these are the easy ones aren't they? Don't most people at some point experience sadness, mourning and a broken heart either personally or in others? These things are not easy to ignore, they are visible and impact everyone equally.

But what about some of those other things that Isaiah writes about. For instance, proclaiming liberty to the captives, release to the prisoners and good news to the poor. Can our speaking about this actually free people from prison? Does a mere visit to a prisoner or a patient in a health care facility give them hope that someone cares? What about all the people who are held hostage to drugs, alcohol, depression, anger, guilt, resentment, loss, loneliness, confusion and despair? Is it possible that our words or actions might assist people to become emotionally, spiritually or psychologically free from their bondage? And what about those people who are imprisoned by external factors such as unemployment, illness, poverty, prejudice, racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, etc.... How can we as individuals and a community of faith respond to people who are held captive to these and other situations?

I wonder how many of us try to avoid this hard work of life sometimes by passing it off to the next person. Do we ever say, that this is not my responsibility, let so and so do it? Besides, isn't it just easier to say that God will take care of all those people? Why do I have to put any effort into this work? I wasn't sent to do any of these things.

I would suggest that all of us, at the time of our baptism were literally anointed with oil and water in the name of the triune God. All of us have been called and chosen for this task. God sends everyone of us out into the world to proclaim this good news!

Let us therefore, be like John the Baptist who in the gospel today was sent by God to proclaim the good news of Jesus and so help prepare the way for the coming reign of God. John was asked, "Who are you"? He confessed that he was NOT the Messiah, and not the famous prophet Elijah. Rather, he claimed to be the voice of a person crying out in the wilderness, pleading for someone, anyone to listen and to act. Haven't most of us been a lone voice at times, advocating for justice, change or responsible action? Don't our words sometimes fall on deaf ears? It's easy for people to ignore a single voice, but if we join our voices together with others then our solitary cry becomes a united roar! It becomes difficult to tune out this loud shout and people are more likely to hear this outcry and make some changes.

My sisters and brothers, let us go forth from this place today with the full knowledge that the Spirit of the Lord is upon each and everyone of us! We are all anointed and sent by God into the world to bring good news to those who are oppressed, to soothe the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and to comfort all who mourn. Let us use our personal, solitary voices to heal, console and advocate for the betterment of all people! Amen.

