



Fourth Sunday after Epiphany (C)
January 31, 2010
Luke 4:21-30
The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato

Jesus in the Synagogue, James Tissot (Brookline Museum of Art)

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

And they whispered, nearly all of them whispered, “Who is this guy, and where did he get this notion of authority? What on earth does he mean, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing?’”

Today, some of us might ask the same questions. After all, are we all on the same page in how we might address these questions even with all the information about God that we have at our disposal?

If we were to go from pew to pew and ask, “Who do you say that Jesus is and are you sure, really sure, that you know where he got his authority?” Some 2,000 years later, it’s fairly easy for us to say that Jesus is the Son of God, and because of that, he has the authority of God. But beyond that, how would *you* describe Jesus?

What biblical stories would you recite to tell someone else about him? How would you tell someone what Jesus means to you personally in your own spiritual life not just what he might mean here in church? Oh and is the Jesus of your personal prayer the same Jesus that you encounter here within the community of faith that we call, Church?

On one level, these questions seem somewhat mundane. On another level, they can be seen as the core of spirituality, one’s personal spirituality and the spirituality of the Church. You and I experience Jesus in many different ways. Even the Scriptures describe him in different ways and with different terms. One of them is a favored one, *Jesus, the Good Shepherd*.

Some of us, if not all of us, find great comfort when we think of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Many years ago, a classmate of mine wrote a beautiful folk-like song based on the 23rd Psalm with the opening words, “O Jesus, gentle shepherd and living bread; feed us, guide us to the land of everlasting life.” (Rev. Tobias Colgan, OSB) Now that image of Jesus is beautiful but it is certainly not the image of the Jesus in today’s passage from Luke.

This passage from Luke is a kind of inaugural address, if you will. Jesus was fresh from his forty days after his baptism and temptation in the wilderness, and perhaps, he had ‘fire in his belly.’

Far from being a voice that might have been easier to hear, Jesus antagonizes those in his home town synagogue and challenges those present to see this “son of Joseph” in the light of the great Jewish prophets, Isaiah, Elijah and Elisha. They were so angry that they drove him out of the synagogue and to the brow of a hill.

This Jesus is far from the gentle shepherd, living bread and guide, images and attributes that are far more comfortable for us than *this* Jesus who spoke with great authority and passion. This Jesus proclaims: “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... (Isaiah 61:1-2).

This proclamation is Jesus’ mission of profound love in the world, a love that is good news to all who long to hear it, to all who look for ways to be free from those things in their lives, those relationships in their lives that are not free, loving, caring or mutually life-giving. This is our mission as the community of faith we call the Church, a mission to love as Paul asks the Corinthians to love, a kind of love that Jesus proclaimed and instilled in his apostles and disciples. It is a love that in its purest form is as Paul says: “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude....[it] rejoices in the truth...[and] endures all things.” (I Corinthians 13: 1-13)

We hear this text over and over again at marriage ceremonies in nearly every Christian tradition. We try to fit it into the relationship between two people who commit their lives to love one another. However, the love that Paul is talking about is the love of the community, the need for the Corinthian community to learn to love one another, to be patient, to be kind, to not be envious or boastful, arrogant or rude.

This is a message about “radical communal love that enables individuals to imagine life in a community where unity and difference can co-exist.” (Karoline Lewis, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN) It is a message about a kind of love that is infectious, a love that we get so excited about that they want to share it with others. We want to spread it in our homes, our communities, our work, and our world.

You and I are called to this radical vision of love. It is a love that Jesus came into the world to proclaim and model. It is a love that our sisters and brothers in Haiti must surely know, as they fight the good fight, attempt to overcome the bonds of suffering and pain, and manage to sing to God for the gifts that God has given them. There is a model of love, communal Christian love, a love so deeply rooted in the community that not even massive suffering, death and destruction can overcome it. If they can experience such love, so can we.

What do we need to do here and now to have fire in our bellies, passion and zeal to be disciples of Jesus? What do we need to do to believe that the Spirit of the Lord is upon us as the sons and daughters of the living God? What do we need to do in the wake of hearing the Word of God and feasting at the Table of Life to go into the world to do all we can to transform it through Christian love.

We can make the world a better place. We can help free others with the knowledge that God’s love is a radical, life-giving and life transforming love. We can model love that is real. As disciples committed to the Gospel, committed to our ever-loving God, let us decide to it happen. Amen!