

“The Spirit is Upon *You!*”
C Epiphany Three; Luke 4:14-21
January 27, 2019; 10:00 am
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO
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Luke 14:14-21 (NRSV)

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

¹⁶When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸“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,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

I. CAN I LEARN FROM YOU, MOTHER?!

The story is told of a Franciscan monk in Australia assigned to be the guide and "gofer" to Mother Teresa when she visited New South Wales. Thrilled and excited at the prospect of being so close to this great woman, he dreamed of how much he would learn from her and what they would talk about.

But during her visit, he became frustrated. Although he was constantly near her, the friar never had the opportunity to say one word to Mother Teresa. There were always other people for her to meet.

Finally, her tour was over, and she was due to fly to New Guinea. In desperation, the Franciscan friar spoke to Mother Teresa: If I pay my own fare to New Guinea, can I sit next to you on the plane so I can talk to you and learn from you? Mother Teresa looked at him. "You have enough money to pay airfare to New Guinea?" she asked.

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." (Anonymous)

II. PREACH IT, BROTHER!

Jesus comes the synagogue in his hometown one day. One Saturday morning –Sabbath Day. Nazareth was

podunk little town –nothing fancy; no famous heroes to speak of or parade around or celebrate big time.

Jesus was no stranger to this little town. He'd grown up there. He was well known and knew them all well. But, he hadn't been just hanging out in the carpentry shop and decided to go to church one day and start preaching. He'd been down to the river to pray, baptized by John and then driven by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days.

He'd endured a time of refining and clarity of his life's purpose—a Vision Quest we might call it. He was tempted and tried, hungry and tired. He had a "Come to Spirit" meeting there in the desert. (*We would call it a Come to Jesus meeting, but I don't think Jesus himself can have a "Come to Jesus" can he?*)

And after all that, he was ready to roll. And he made a big splash quickly, as he came out of his Wilderness time and began to teach and preach all over the Galilee.

¹⁴Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

So, he stands up to teach –in a place they called the "Moses Seat" and the bible scroll is handed to him and he begins to read.

God's Spirit is on me;

he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor,

Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind,

To set the burdened and battered free,

to announce, "This is God's year to act!"

And every eye in the place is on him! Every ear tuned-in to learn what this quote means now, today, for their edification. They're ready for a good sermon, a closing hymn, a Benediction and Coffee Hour!

But Jesus doesn't stay in the pulpit and deliver an eloquent sermon! He sits down. Quips something about how that bible verse—that prophecy— is happening here and now, and literally leaves them hanging.

"You've just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place."

What? What does that *mean*, Jesus? You fulfilled the scriptures? You, little hometown boy? Wait! You're talking about all of us? Here, in this place? "This is God's year to act" and we are to be part of that that effort? Get on the team; join your band? That we are chosen too? That God's Spirit is upon us—as this prophecy is coming true right here in our midst?

It's a classic Cliffhanger! Today's scripture literally leaves us hanging, leaves the message in *our* laps to finish the sermon. And, you'll have to come next week for the next episode of "Saturdays with Jesus in Nazareth" to find out where this all leads! I'll give you a hint –there's a *real* cliff in "the rest of the story!"

III. YOU HAVE ENOUGH? GO AND SHARE!

"You have enough money to pay airfare to New Guinea?" Mother Teresa asked. "Then give that money to the poor," You'll learn more from that than anything I can tell you."

She puts it right back on *him*. As all great wisdom teachers seem to do, the world over! Jesus does the same. Not that he's giving "self-help" tips, as if the world revolved around us, it's all about me, or the like. That's a very modern concept –this individualistic approach to life, salvation and saving the world.

But Jesus *is* saying, "It's all about US!" Working together, one in the Spirit; one in the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord is upon us! God has sent us to do some things! Right now. All together. And let me tell you what they are:

Feed the hungry; clothe the naked, house the homeless, heal the sick of heart and body, love your neighbor. Love your enemy. Love the immigrant and the stranger and the foreigner in your midst!

Tell the blind—spiritually and physically blind alike—that they can *see!* Help them see! "Open the eyes of ALL our hearts, Lord!" Open our mouths to share *good*

news! That all are beloved. That all are children of the Creator and will be free—that will shall overcome. The chains will be broken; the past wrongs will be righted, and forgiveness will abound!

Jesus got a pretty clear message what he was to do. Not just that day at church, but throughout his growing up years, through his baptism and into that hard season in the wilderness. But, even so, that day in Nazareth was still just a beginning. He didn't get a road map – anymore than we do. A step-by-step GPS was not in those words from Isaiah or any other scriptures.

But he *did* get a clear message and sense of direction—a Way, a path—the Way of love, compassion, acceptance and mercy. And so are we.

¹²Very truly I tell you, (Jesus says to all disciples) whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these. (John 14)

IV. FINDING DIRECTION

So, what will *we* do? We, who call ourselves followers of Jesus; called *along with him*, by the Spirit?

Many wise teachers have spoken over the eons about finding that calling, that destiny. They agree that it takes a sense of openness to the Creator, an empty vessel eager to be filled, a journey of co-creation, and a practice of relationship with the Holy, to find it.

"We are not permitted to choose the frame of our destiny, but what we put into it is ours." (Dag Hammarskjöld)

Poet Mary Oliver, a true "saint of the soul" for our times, died recently. She spoke of *her* calling—poetry—as a way of life in the form of an empty basket.

"Poetry isn't a profession, it's a way of life. It's an empty basket; you put your life into it and make something out of that."

Mary "preached good news" to the poor of spirit" with her writing. She had suffered a childhood of abuse, and refused to become a victim for life. Instead, she found a "salve" in the natural world for that trauma and recurrent nightmares, and wanted to give that salve as a gift to others.

She said of her journey to becoming the expressive master God called her to be, "I felt those first important connections, those first experiences being made with the natural world rather than with the social world." She sought to serve and feed the broken and hungry creation, and her gift was universal, communal, corporate.

The Spirit-call came to Mary Oliver in the form of a question:

"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

Mary Oliver's openness to wisdom and guidance came from her walks in the woods. And *during* those walks—literally!

So, she took to carrying a notepad with her and placing wooden pencils strategically in the trees along the paths she walked! Always ready, if a creative thought struck her! I love this! Many of us keep journals by the bed, or sticky notes on the mirror. I hear you can even get waterproof notepads for the shower! Gotta be ready at any point for creative inspiration and living out your call!

I am grateful to friend and colleague Rev. Tracey Dawson (Parker UCC) for sharing some of this background and profound sense of vocation about Mary Oliver to enlighten us.

Another friend and colleague, Rev. Jake Joseph (Plymouth UCC in Ft Collins) shares a helpful metaphor as we seek our calling:

For those of us who sometimes struggle with the title and history of the name "Christian," I might suggest that the coolest rebranding we could do as an institution would be to call ourselves Water Walkers! Can you imagine the logos we could develop?

In all seriousness, Scripture is all about risk-taking and learning to reinvent ourselves. From Genesis to Proverbs to Matthew, we find sayings and stories that remind us that life changes, God is with us, and we have to take risks to make a difference. Life is about learning to walk on the water... and learning to swim with joy when it just doesn't work out the first time.

Another saint for our times, **Rev. Peter J. Gomes**, shared his very practical wisdom with a number of graduating classes, for finding the answer to this question:

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?”

*Think small and act large....focus your abilities on things you can actually accomplish and control, like: yourself, your temper, your manners, your values, your soul.

*What counts most in life it how you cope with failure, not how you deal with success. Jettison all of your toxic regrets.

*Get over it, get used to it, get on with it....Life is inherently messy, filled with unfinished business...if we are to live well and not just think about living, we had better take care of those things that are right before us and doable.

*Learn to cherish your limitations. The trick in life is not to know how to get what you want but to live life well when you don't get what you want....

*Be overwhelmed with opportunity....be intimate with the immensity of life, not intimidated by it.

*Live in the present...Don't be shackled by regrets from the past or anxiety about the future.

*Find your vocation. Don't just get a job....Frederick Buechner wrote that your vocation is “where your great joy meets the world's greatest need.” Find that holy intersection and—for God's sake—don't settle for less.

Finally, the wisdom of the saints over the ages, never grows old our out of date:

Christ Has No Body (Teresa of Avila 1515-1582)

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

God's Spirit is on *us*;

Holy Spirit has chosen *us* to preach the Message of good news to the poor,

Sent *us* to announce pardon to prisoners and

recovery of all kinds of sight and insight to the blind,

To set the burdened and battered, imprisoned, oppressed and discriminated-against free,

to announce, “*This* is God's year to act!”

In us. With us. Alongside us. May *we* be God's agents.
Water walkers. Poets parking pencils in trees so that Spirit might inspire at any moment. Hometown men and women, boys and girls, prophets, priests and everyday people. Chosen and sent by the Spirit.

Filled with the Spirit, Filled with God's grace
Filled with the friendship we find in this place.
Called as disciples, go now in faith.
Jesus will show the way! Amen.