

3rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Cycle A)

January 27, 2008 -- Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.

INTRODUCTION

Back when I was a young man – studying for the gallows, as Mark Twain once said – I was a member of the Memphis Jaycees – the “Junior Chamber of Commerce” – now sometimes I wonder if there’s a “Senior Chamber of Commerce.” Anyway, at every meeting, we’d have lunch and recite the “Jaycee Creed.”

It starts out,

“We believe that faith in God gives meaning and purpose to human life . . . “

It ends,

“We believe that service to humanity is the best work of life.”

At the time, I was young and had other things on my mind. I’m not sure that I really grasped the importance of those words. I just stood up and said them, along with everybody else. But particularly as I’ve grown older, I’ve come to understand that it really is faith in God and service to other people that gives meaning and purpose to human life.

In essence, that’s what we are called to do as Christians – have faith, and be of service to others.

MOVE

We are called by name. I guess most of us listen to the Sunday readings – at least I hope we do – but we often don’t make much connection with the readings from last Sunday, and next Sunday, and how they all sort of fit together, build on a theme.

For the last couple of Sundays, faith and service to others has been the message of Scripture. Last Sunday, Isaiah said,

The LORD said to me: You are my servant,
Now the LORD has spoken

who formed me as his servant from the womb,
It is too little, the LORD says, for you to be my servant,
I will make you a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

We even agreed to it – or we said we did. In the Responsorial Psalm, we sang,

Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

On the Sunday before last, Isaiah said,

Thus says the LORD:
Here is my servant whom I uphold,
I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice,
I have grasped you by the hand;
I formed you, and set you
as a covenant of the people,
a light for the nations,
to open the eyes of the blind,
to bring out prisoners from confinement,
and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

MOVE

In today's Gospel, we hear of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecies.

I love that first reading from Isaiah. We hear some of the same reading every year at Midnight Mass on Christmas. If there's a down-side to being a deacon, it is that I don't get to proclaim that reading at Midnight Mass any more.

Today, we see the prophecies of the Old Testament fulfilled in Jesus, at the beginning of his ministry in Galilee.

Anguish has taken wing, dispelled is darkness . . .

That image of the coming of the light of Christ into the darkness of our world . . . the darkness is dispelled, "the Lord is my light" . . . powerful stuff.

In today's Gospel, Jesus calls the disciples by name, and works miracles of healing. We didn't hear it in today's reading, but at the end of Matthew's Gospel, we find our own job description.

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

That's our mission statement. We are called to preach the gospel to all men, to call all men to discipleship and ministry, and to heal the sick. That's it, in a few words. That's the mission of the Church in the world today – a continuation of the universal mission Christ proclaimed in Galilee.

MOVE

We are called by name. I've talked quite a bit in the past about how hard it can be to hear the call in the noisy and distracting world we live in. It can be even harder to follow the call. But our job is to listen for the call, to hear it, to follow it – in short, to be disciples.

Think about what the disciples did. They immediately stopped what they were doing, put down the tools of their trade, left their families, left their old lives behind. Can you imagine the courage and faith that must have required? It was a complete change of direction.

Christ calls for undivided hearts. As disciples, we cannot both follow him and continue to hold onto our sin. Simon and Andrew, James and John – they all left their boats and their careers on a moment's notice. How many of us would be willing to do that? It's a remarkable response.

It seems to me that such a response has to be founded on hope – trust in the promises of Christ – confidence in his Kingdom and in his final victory at the end of time.

For us, that change of direction takes the form of repentance, along with a commitment to leave our old lives behind to follow the Lord.

MOVE

What does it mean to be a “disciple?” The word comes from the Latin “discipulus,” meaning “pupil.” The Latin word “discipere” means to grasp intellectually, to analyze thoroughly, to “take apart.” Same root that gives us the word “discipline.” As disciples, we are called to follow.

As disciples, we are “followers.” That comes hard for a lot of people. A lot of people prefer to think of themselves as “leaders.” But our fundamental identity is not as “leaders,” but as “followers” or “companions” of Christ. In a sense, disciples play “Follow the Leader.” And the leader is Christ.

Disciples also make more disciples. We have to reproduce, if you will. Any species that can’t reproduce itself is in a bad way, headed for extinction.

MOVE

Well, once again . . . so what?

Christ is the light of the world, and the Gospel is his message. Reading Scripture regularly helps us to keep focused on our job as disciples. Lent begins in a couple of weeks. Instead of giving up Rye whiskey and Cuban cigars, maybe a good Lenten practice would be to read the whole New Testament. It’s not that long.

Christ turned fishermen into fishers of men. If you think about it, being a commercial fisherman requires certain skills – patience, teamwork, persistence, not giving up in the face of temporary setbacks – skills that are good for disciples to cultivate.

It’s also good to take a few minutes from time to time to give ourselves a “discipleship checkup.” How are we doing? Are we making progress in our spiritual life? Do we see conversion as a process, not as an event? Are we always aware of the need for constant repentance, for the need to deal with our own shortcomings and the shortcomings of others? This Lent might be a good time to cultivate the practice of a nightly examination of conscience to help us keep our goals in view.

Then there’s the matter of our call. We are called by name. We talk about “laborers in the vineyard” – but sometimes it seems like we want to be “vineyard supervisors” and let others do the labor. But that’s not the job we’re called to. We are called to be disciples – followers.

READINGS

Reading 1

Is 8:23—9:3

First the Lord degraded the land of Zebulun
and the land of Naphtali;
but in the end he has glorified the seaward road,
the land west of the Jordan,
the District of the Gentiles.

Anguish has taken wing, dispelled is darkness:
for there is no gloom where but now there was distress.
The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom
a light has shone.
You have brought them abundant joy
and great rejoicing,
as they rejoice before you as at the harvest,
as people make merry when dividing spoils.
For the yoke that burdened them,
the pole on their shoulder,
and the rod of their taskmaster
you have smashed, as on the day of Midian.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 27:1, 4, 13-14

R. (1a) The Lord is my light and my salvation.

The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom should I fear?

The LORD is my life's refuge;
of whom should I be afraid?

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

One thing I ask of the LORD;
this I seek:

To dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,

That I may gaze on the loveliness of the LORD
and contemplate his temple.

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

I believe that I shall see the bounty of the LORD
in the land of the living.

Wait for the LORD with courage;
be stouthearted, and wait for the LORD.

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

Reading II

1 Cor 1:10-13, 17

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same purpose. For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you. I mean that each of you is saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning.

Gospel

Mt 4:12-23 or 4:12-17

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what had been said through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled:
*Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles,
the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light,
on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death
light has arisen.*
From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. He walked along from there and saw two other brothers,

James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John.
They were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets.
He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father
and followed him.
He went around all of Galilee,
teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom,
and curing every disease and illness among the people.

or

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