

Homily

Aug. 31, 2020

Scriptures: 1 Cor 2:1-5; Psalm 119:97-102; Luke 4: 16-30

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This Gospel passage is familiar, perhaps too familiar, to those of us who are sisters and associates of the IHM community. When asked how to describe our charism, we often go back to verses from Luke 4 – they are included in our Constitutions and, I would imagine, many of us can quote them verbatim.

Jesus tells those gathered that the words of the prophet are being fulfilled in their hearing. Their response:

“... all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.”

I can see them figuratively patting themselves on the back. “Isn’t this great! The words we have been listening too all of our lives from the great prophet Isaiah ARE being fulfilled. Look what we are doing: bringing glad tidings to the poor ... proclaiming liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind – letting the oppressed go free ... why it’s truly a year of Jubilee!”

This is the point in the story that we stop as well. And we take it to heart – we heed the call and with deep faith and courageous spirit we respond with action for justice.

What we DON’T usually refer to, however, is the rest of the story that is told in that same passage.

So – let’s look at what else is said AND how the listeners respond.

Jesus, still seated, continues as a prophet usually does, noting that he knows well that what he is about to say is not going to be accepted “in his own country,” but he went on anyways.

- When there was a great famine in the land – to whom was Elijah sent? A widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon.
- Although there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha it was the Syrian, Naaman, who was cleansed.

And how did the people gathered respond to this?

They were filled with fury and rose up, drove him out of town to take him to the brow of a hill where they could hurl him down headlong!

What in the world happened that changed their hearts from receiving the word with openness and joy to anger and even violence? I struggled to find an answer and, as so often happens, an unexpected insight was presented as I was attending to something else. It came in a reflection I used as I prayed our Gospel reading yesterday, the 22nd Sunday of Ordinary Time.

Carol Dempsey, a Dominican Sister of Caldwell, N.J., wrote:

“To be prophetic ... is to embody the margins. To live on the margins is to be uncomfortable, forever yearning, pining and thirsting for the One whose Spirit provides strength, purpose and sustenance when the work of justice leaves our bones wearied and our hearts broken.

“The temptation for those who are privileged in any way is to stay comfortable, But the call to the privileged is to act prophetically, to be displaced to the margins if we are not already there.”

From “Margins Speak Truth”
NCR, Aug. 21-Sept. 3, 2020, p. 13

I think that may have been it. The privileged members of the synagogue were invited to leave their comfort zone and go to the margins – and they didn’t want to hear it.

Inclusion of “the other” as friend and disciple, as the faithful ones, the witnesses of what the reign of God looks like is everywhere in Jesus’ life:

- It’s the Samaritan who rescues the person left by the side of the road.
- It’s the Syro-Phoenician woman who receives healing for her daughter.
- It is the Roman soldier whose faith is rewarded with the healing of his servant.

Where are the margins of today? Who are the marginalized – whose voices are we being called to listen to, and what of our privilege and status must we let go of in order to fully open ourselves to hear deeply / honestly / without reservation?

Carol Dempsey continues,

“The margins (are making) their presence known and felt. They expose the myriad of injustices that have plagues, riddled and marred the human community for eons. ... The margins speak truth to power. They press in on comfort zones. They will not accept being silenced, bullied, pushed aside, discounted any longer.

From “Margins Speak Truth”

Indeed, we hear the words of Luke 4 and embrace them as ours – perhaps today we are being invited to go beyond the familiar – and take a further step into the margins.