

In the Name of the Living God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

According to St. Luke, Jesus has begun his ministry and has returned to Nazareth where he appears at the temple there.

It was the custom to allow any adult Jewish male to read scripture aloud in the temple. So, he steps forward, and conveniently enough, he is handed the scroll containing the words of the prophet Isaiah.

Without any hesitation, he reads to them: "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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And then, while everyone is watching him, he sits down and proclaims further,

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Whoa. "What?", they think. "Who? This guy? This one who grew up in our town, and we've known since boyhood? The one who we saw learn to hammer and saw wood at the feet of his father, Joseph?"

"That's right", Jesus thinks to himself in response, "The waiting is over."

And today, we need to ask ourselves, "What is Jesus doing here in this gospel story...or, better yet, why is he doing it?" What is today's message, and what does it mean for us?

His going into the temple and, following long tradition, going forward to read scripture before the others...there is nothing unusual or new in that. But he steps forward....across a line. He uses the tradition of his faith to be the springboard for his jumping forward...and he proclaims aloud to the others his understanding of his ministry, his call, his purpose for being on the face of the earth.

And that purpose? Is to shake things up. To change the spiritual status quo and, as a result, to seek to redirect the course of the human experience. Because, friends, like it or not, acknowledging it or not in our daily lives, the truth of it all is that the very purpose of your life and mine, the proper direction of the course of all human experience, is all completely defined and measured by relationship with God.

Jesus comes to shake things up. To move daily living, and life as a whole, away from the status quo of what was before, and back to the proper, personal relationship with the living God.

So, in that spirit of shaking things up, we focus today...(during the service of the Annual Meeting of this parish for 2016,) on the simple, factual theme of...shaking things up. Why? Only because it is different. There is no great theological reason or message...at least none that has been revealed so far.

But, that is ok. Because this parish is not the same place that it was a year ago, let alone some three years ago when this gospel reading was last read according to the lectionary. It cannot be, because you and I are not the same as we were last year, or even as we were yesterday...whether we like it or not. And I think that is pretty well accepted...after all, if your life today was exactly the same as it was every day this past week, or even longer, well...would not you wonder about it all?

Now, (on the day of the Annual Meeting,) consider last Sunday's message.

If you were here, we will review it briefly. And if you were not, well...listen up, because it is critical. Last Sunday, we heard of the first recorded miracle performed by Jesus at the wedding in Cana...the turning of water into wine during the wedding feast. Why would he do that? Making more barrels of wine for a big drunk does not seem appropriately "reverent" or "proper" in the eyes and presence of God. But, then and now, Jesus did not and does not particularly care about what you or I think is the right attitude before God...because God does not care about that either.

Jesus just meets the needs of people where they are...trivial or inappropriate in our eyes, or not. God moves within change. Within daily miracles of major or minor effect, and that some of us see and understand, and others do not. Miracles continue and work around us all the time, and to grow in grace means to become increasingly aware that everything in life is a miracle, a sign pointing to Christ. Jesus is always turning the water of ordinariness into the wine of miracles, and again our responsibility is let others know these signs are abundant, and Christ is the one to whom they point.

This week is the revelation of our part in that. Like Jesus, when we see the purpose and mission before us...either as individuals or as a parish..we need to step up and take the initiative. You know the saying, "He who hesitates is lost." Jesus saw the time, and rose up to meet it...and now, through Jesus, God means for creation to continue forward...and we can either meet it and engage it, or otherwise get out of the way and watch it pass by. Like Jesus, and so many others before me, I am not here at this parish or at court, taking up time, space and air across more than sixty years, just to maintain the status quo. I pray that am alive to shake things up...in a gentle, loving, compassionate way, for sure...but we are all here to shake things up....remembering that it is not we who serve the church, but it is the church of Jesus Christ that is here to serve each of us...in OUR individual call and ministry.

The celebration of life of ths parish, concentrated in the focus of the tasks at hand, is time to think and focus on life in general, while praising God always. Thanks be to God...for the little daily miracles, things of life that change from the status quo that they represent...and for the continually changing world that we are called to engage, all in the company and help of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.