

3 Epiphany  
January 24, 2010  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## **“Creating the Church of Christ”**

Today’s Gospel from Chapter 4 of Luke’s Gospel is often used for services of ordination or services that begin a new ministry. In it, Jesus reads from the Book of Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He 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.”

St Luke’s Gospel is known as the Gospel to the marginalized, the sick, the poor, and the sinner. He preaches that Jesus is a Messiah who has come to lift up all; and by all, he wishes to include all those who have little standing in Judaism: the foreigner, the despised, the lost and those cursed by affliction.

Whereas Matthew’s Gospel emphasizes how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament prophecies; and Mark tells of a Suffering Messiah who makes sense of pain and death, Luke’s Gospel emphasizes a universal church. As the constant companion of St Paul on his missionary journeys, it is easy to see how Luke’s began to think in this way. From country to country, and town to town, Luke experienced the life of ordinary people at first hand. We learn in the Acts of the Apostles, that Luke is a doctor trained to bring healing and comfort to those with disease, blindness, crippling afflictions and even incurable illness such as leprosy.

In this light, Luke’s view of Jesus is one of a savior, who comes to save people from more than sin and death. Jesus arrives to lift people out of the quagmire of despair, the chains of poverty, and the burden of infirmity.

We see this throughout Luke’s Gospel is story after story of healing miracles and Jesus’ parables of compassion. Yet Luke goes further, because in his ministry Jesus is seen planting the seeds of his church and insuring that the ministry of love, he has begun continues long after his death. In Luke’s Gospel, it is the Holy Spirit that transforms Jesus’ disciples into a Body of Christ that will continue Jesus' work into the future.

Paul, Luke's traveling companion, has this as the central theme of today's second reading in 1Corinthians. Remember that this letter was written at least 20 years before Luke's Gospel, you have to wonder whether the two of them sat up talking

around a campfire, simply discussing Jesus and his mission and what it meant.

Paul's writing is a model for a church. He is saying: "Here is how you build a church. Here is how you continue Christ's saving work."

For Paul, everything begins with baptism. What unites us in Baptism is that we all receive the same Spirit of God. In doing so, all are called to service in Christ's saving mission. Paul just wants to emphasize that, each is called according to their abilities. We have many ministries, but one mission.

Paul's letter reflects how the church operated in those years after Christ's death that we call, the Apostolic Age. The community of Christians gathered to worship and they chose from their own number, individuals to be teachers, deacons, healers, builders, preachers or leaders. They then together laid hands on them and anointed them with oil.

The church does the same today, as we saw one month ago at Chellie's ordination. The Bishop shares his ministry with us. We shared that ministry among one another. That is why we call it: Shared Ministry." It abides by the one rule that St Paul emphasized: "There are many ministries, but there is only one mission. It is the mission of Jesus Christ as outlined in today's Gospel.

In six days time your Vestry will meet representing all the ministries of this church. Gathered together for a day, they will pray, then discuss and then decide on some important aspects of ministry and the parish's future direction. In the course of that day the Vestry will decide on several issues, among them is this document from Bishop Paul Marshall.

The document entitles: "Pastoral Provisions for Same Sex Couples", takes the motion of General Convention 2009: "The discernment of the Episcopal Church is that there are no theological barriers to blessing same sex relationships that are based on love, fidelity and life long commitment;" and moves it to a diocesan and parish level.

It is important, that if you have views on this subject, that you contact your Vestry person. Their names are in the bulletin. At least, please pray for your Vestry this week that the decisions they make may be guided by the Holy Spirit and fulfill the mission of that Gospel.

Lastly, we are left with today's first reading from the Prophet Nehemiah encourages the people to celebrate and praise the law. It reminds each of us why we bother to have laws, whether it is the law of the land; Canon law or our own simple by-laws.

Our law is there, so that with our help and cooperation, God may rule in our institutions and in our hearts.

Without law, there is chaos, that primordial state that existed before creation. With law, there is order and there is freedom to grow. Jesus enhances creation, because to God's law, he adds humanity, compassion and the law of love.

Amen+