

**Sermon for Jan. 24th 2010, Luke 4**

**He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written.**

**“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.”**

**The gospel lesson we heard this morning from the fourth chapter of Luke comes directly after the account of Jesus’ baptism and the story of the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness. For Luke, all three stories are Holy Spirit stories as the spirit empowers Jesus for the ministry that lies before him.**

**The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus as a dove while he is praying after his baptism. Then the Holy Spirit fills Jesus with strength as he is led into the wilderness for a time of testing as Jesus refuses the pathways that are the wrong choices for servant ministry. Now, as Jesus returns to Galilee, the Holy Spirit fills him with power for ministry as he reads a text that will be his mission statement as the Messiah.**

**Jesus presents these verses from Isaiah as a description of who God is and what Jesus is about. This is a defining moment in the life of Jesus and the Church.**

**When Jesus reads from the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah in the synagogue he is declaring that his ministry as the Messiah calls him to be an agent of mercy to the downtrodden in this world. The good news of Christ is to be heard by the poor and oppressed, those at the margins of society.**

**Each time I read this gospel lesson over the last week, I kept wondering how the people of Haiti would hear it this morning as it is read to them in their makeshift churches. I wondered how the poorest of the poor would perceive these words after such incredible devastation.**

**And after pondering this for some time, I have come to realize that it is no coincidence that we are hearing these words of Jesus on this third Sunday of Epiphany and second Sunday after that terrible day that has changed lives forever.**

**I know that Haitians are hearing these words of Jesus today. I know it because of the stories we have heard over the last 10 days.**

**Stories in the first 24 hours following the quake that said that when night fell on the streets of Port AU Prince people were singing hymns and psalms. Blessed be God, they sang.**

**Stories of the Dean and students of the Episcopal Seminary pitching tents on a soccer field of one of the crushed parish schools to set up shelter for the survivors.**

**Stories of the Episcopal bishop of Haiti holding a church service last Sunday on the steps of a one story building amidst a completely destroyed Episcopal Cathedral using an altar made out of a debilitated wooden folding table, preaching the following words: “Life is like this. There are moments like this, moments of sadness. There are moments of celebration. What’s important is to keep the faith. We must keep the faith, knowing that God is with us in the good days as well as in the bad days.”**

**Yes, these words and actions of Christ followers in Haiti assure me that this mission of the Messiah is being heard loud and clear. Indeed the people of Haiti are showing us that Jesus continues to be true to his word.**

**Of course we know from the teachings of Jesus, from his dying on a cross and being raised from the dead, that Jesus coming to fulfill the words of the prophet Isaiah about bringing good news to the poor and release for the prisoners is not just about the financially poor or those incarcerated. Jesus speaks to all of us when he quotes the words of his mission statement. For certainly there are times in each of our lives, where we are poor in spirit, or held captive to something that takes us away from God.**

**Indeed Jesus has been true to this mission. The implication of this Gospel lesson for us today is that we need to continue to look at our own mission statements, both individually and collectively to determine if we are following that path that God is calling us to travel, day in and day out. To know our mission and to understand what God has given us to do are as important today as they were to Jesus and his followers.**

**What is the mission statement for St. John's? Does this mission statement reflect Jesus' mission statement and are we living it out? The answer is yes, St. John's mission statement, which consists of just four words – to share Christ's love - does reflect Jesus' mission statement and you as a Parish are living it out.**

**But of course, what this gospel lesson is calling each one of us to do today is to look inside our selves and ask – are we living out the mission to share Christ’s love as fully as we are able? If the answer to that question for you individually is yes, than thank you.**

**If you are uncertain, than I would simply ask that you prayerfully discern if God is calling you to give more, and if so how God is calling you to give. And if the answer to that question is, no I am not living out the mission to share Christ’s love as fully as I am able, than believe me, when you give more, whether it be your time, talent or treasure, you will reap the benefits of knowing you are living the Mission statement of the Messiah.**

**As Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians that we heard a portion of today, though many members we are all baptized into one body. Vestry member, Sacket Wood, in his remarks to the congregation last Sunday summed this up with the perfect words. He said, you the people of St. John’s are the body of Christ that executes its ministry and mission and moves it forward.**

**I have said it many times – I am grateful to serve God in this place. Many times I have stood at that communion rail and held the Body of Christ, both in my hands and in my heart, and countless times I have looked at each of you coming forward - many hands stretched out as one body – and I have been incredibly humbled. Thank you for being the body of Christ. Thank you looking inside yourselves and giving all that you can back to God in order that we may indeed continue living out the mission of our Messiah.**