

A Life of Intention

Epiphany 3C

1/23/2022

Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

If you have ever worked in a corporate environment or even worked on a sales team you are constantly evaluating. Having had experience working in both environments at separate times in my life I have had the pleasure of experiencing such questions as: Are we living up to our mission statement? Can we craft an elevator speech for this product line? Do we need to reimagine our mission statement? Still to this day these phrases tend to creep into my conversations and as time goes on the more cringy I feel about it. Especially if it has something to do with the life of the church. Even more so if I am trying to define myself and how I intend to live life.

Every Gospel has Jesus in some way defining himself. What kind of messiah will I be?, he seems to ask and answer. Expectations were high for the Messiah. Most held onto the idea that the Messiah was going to come with chariots upon chariots, soldiers upon soldiers, the messiah was to be a conquering force, delivering God's people from the hand of those who oppressed. A conquering king. In our Gospel passage from Luke this morning, Jesus comes to temple, like he has done since he was a child, and takes out the scroll of Isaiah and reads:

"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."

He then sits down, as it was custom to do when you were teaching, and says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Not the most awe inspiring sermon. I mean, it doesn't have a catchy introduction, no real deep dive into the socio/political background of the text and nothing about what you do next. Nine words. That's all you get from Jesus. This sermon would not have passed the rigorous muster of a preaching course in any seminary. If all the scriptures he could have pulled from Jesus chose this one. Bring good news to the poor? Proclaim release to the captives? Heal and proclaim God's favor? That's me he tells the crowd.

If we read a little further down, the Gospeler tells us that they were beside themselves with astonishment at "his gracious words". Not exactly the messiah they were dreaming of but apparently there was something to this simple act and moment that moved the crowd. Hearing freedom and deliverance is music to the oppressed ears. Keep in mind that Israel was being occupied by the Romans at this time. One wrong move and the thin thread by which Israel was hanging on to would snap, leaving them falling into a dark, dangerous abyss. Any sign of hope would have been greeted warmly, even though they would have rather had a warrior king, destroying and conquering. Jesus says I'm going to do something different. Instead of using tactics of violence and hostility I am going to make the once invisible, visible. It is a revelation of

sorts, isn't it? What Jesus is saying here is that instead of delivering through weapons, we can deliver people through visibility. Making sure that those who are the most on the outskirts of society's mind will be put front and center. And even though I have that aversion to mission statements, I believe here we can redeem this temporal term. Jesus gives us his mission statement. A montra one might say.

The question that Jesus seems to be asking us today is the same question he found himself answering so long ago. How do I intend to live my life? It is a question that we all have asked ourselves, I believe. What is our story? What is it that we say to ourselves about our identity and purpose? Oftentimes these are the things that we play over and over in our mind. What is my intention. There was an article on ABC's website that I came across and the question was, "Did I love enough today?" The article is about this mother who talks about her day with her little one. The books that were read, the frustrations of being a parent. She talks about the ups and downs that she goes through and the last question she turns over at the end of the day, is did I love you enough? The intentionality is to love and care for her little one. Daughters of the King dedicate their life to prayer and to service. A beautiful way to live out their intention to be of service.

Living a life of intention is no easy task. We, when we are baptized and when we reaffirm our baptismal vows, acknowledge this intention with the understanding that we won't always get it right. You'll find the phrase "will you strive to..." followed by bedrock intention, rooted in Christ's mission statement. This is how we here in the Church choose to publicly name our intention. But because we are human we have an undercurrent of things that influence us. Will I ever be good enough? I'm always going to fail. Why am I always trying knowing that I'll end up right back here. Maybe I should just take care of myself and my family. Someone else will notice that person.

The question that I have for you this morning is a simple one. What is your undercurrent of questions, doubts, fears; the things that you say to yourself sound like? What was the genesis of those things? Do you still need to hold on to them or can you let them go? We are all striving to become more human, to become more fully ourselves. If you are sitting here in this church this morning or watching from home I am going to assume that you've found something in the life giving, liberating way of Jesus. He defines this way for us: Bring good news to the poor. Proclaim release to the captives in whatever way that might look like. Give back sight to those who are blind and remember blindness means more than being unable to see because of injury, disease, or a congenital condition. Being blind can mean lacking perception, awareness, or discernment, especially to those who are cast aside by society. Proclaim freedom to the oppressed so that they can live a life that flourishes with beautiful humanity. And when you begin to proclaim this good news, that there is a God that loves you, just because you are you, that there is forgiveness and mercy waiting to be found, you no longer have an elevator speech, montra, or mission statement, you have action bathed in love.