

3rd Sunday of Epiphany

“Today”
Luke 4:14-21

January 24, 2010

The movie “Forrest Gump” has been viewed by many and most of us know it well enough to cite lines from the movie. Perhaps the two most famous lines are: “Stupid is what stupid does” and “Life is like a box of chocolates....” But there is another line worth noting from another scene in the movie. This particular scene has one of the central characters, Jenny, returning to her home after her father has died. The old home, a farmhouse, is dilapidated and abandoned. As she reflects on the abuse she suffered as a child, she is overcome by rage and begins throwing rocks at the house. The photography is powerful as it shows her rapidly reaching for rocks and then violently throwing them at the house. Jenny finally falls to the ground in exhaustion and the scene closes with Forrest Gump philosophically saying, “Sometimes there just aren’t enough rocks.”

I remember some years back when I desperately wanted rocks, lots of rocks to throw. It was when I heard the news of the best man at my wedding having just died of AIDS. And it wasn’t his death per se, but a culmination of prejudiced, rejection he had experienced, being abandoned by the church, dying penniless and a ward of the state, well I just couldn’t find enough rocks.

Jesus said, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.”

When I heard The Rev. Pat Robertson claim that because years ago one of the leaders of Haiti seemed to have made a pact with the devil, the earthquake and all Haiti has suffered was caused by that deal and that they deserve what they had gotten, it felt as if he had picked up rocks to throw at Haiti. When I hear political leaders on both sides of the isle claim to have the truth and then blame and condemn their opponent I see rocks being thrown.

“He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind.”

Forty-five years after the civil rights movement began we still hear of prejudice being the motivating factor among issues of injustice, of violence, and of abuse. African Americans are profiled, Jewish people are terrorized with German swastikas, and middle-eastern people, in particular those who are Muslim by faith are singled out as people not to be trusted and kept off of airplanes. We continue to look for rocks to throw.

“To let the oppressed go free.”

When Isaiah was a prophet one of his main criticisms against Israel was that Israel would go through the motions of religious observance (i.e. fasting), but there would be no accompanying actions of justice (no change in their behavior). People oppressed by the system remained oppressed. The poor remained poor.

Jesus comes on the scene and accomplishes what the nation of Israel could not get done, that is, he carries out a program of righteousness (a change begins to take place). Jesus responds directly to those

who oppressed, receives rejection, condemnation, and eventually death. Regarding Jesus, Israel never runs out of rocks!

“To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

In the days of Jesus, according to traditional expression, the poor are those who look to God for help. They are the powerless of society, dependent on the system to act justly if their needs are to be met. Unlike the rich, those who are at ease in Zion, the poor observe God’s precepts. But they are despised by the wealthy. Jesus’ ministry, his mission, is a practical one. He came to change things for the better. Life will now be different for many in Israel. This difference will be felt immediately. If not in terms of how society responds, for sure how God responds to their needs.

“Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”

Jesus came to the people in such a way that he replaces the desire to throw rocks with the desire to hear God’s word of hope. Jesus comes to allay our fears. By saying “today” Jesus was telling the people, and us as well, that there is immediate action when God’s word is spoken. The message is fulfilled in the hearing of the word.

It was Isaiah who compared the Word of God with the rain. His comparison was that as rain brings forth vegetation (causes things to grow), so God’s Word acts in the same way. Whatever the message is, it begins to come to pass as it is being spoken. God’s Word is alive and powerful! We therefore have hope when it is spoken on our behalf.

Perhaps you have felt as I have, wanting to throw rocks? Perhaps your life has known more powerlessness than power, especially regarding future plans, future dreams, and future desires? Then these words of Jesus ought to bring you comfort. Regardless of what has gone before, no matter what is happening in your life now, the word of God is one to bring comfort and hope. For we, who at times feel like prisoners, who walk blinded by fear or anger, broken by the uncertainty of our future have received a new word today. Today God has told us we will find release, we will see again, and we who have been broken will be made whole.

Today, in our hearing, this has come true!

AMEN