

Epiphany 4
Year C
Luke 4:21-30

Come Holy Spirit, give life to my words.

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.

Amen.

Luke's rendition of Jesus' visit to his hometown Temple continues in today's gospel.

In last week's section, Jesus stuns his hometown by announcing that He has come to fulfill God's promise of liberation.

He has come to inaugurate the new narrative of God's promise.

Jesus continues in today's gospel by repeating that he is the manifestation of God's promise of liberation and renewal.

Last week Jesus illustrated for those in the Temple the work that God has desired of the people of Israel since they entered into covenant with him.

Jesus has read from the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah in which he details God's desire, releasing the captives; recovering sight for the blind; freeing the oppressed; and inaugurating the year of the Jubilee when the debts of the poor are forgiven.

But now, to the astonishment of the Temple goers,
He references the well-known stories of
Elijah's healing of the widow at Zarephath in Sidon
and Elisha's healing of Naaman the Syrian.

In doing so, Jesus reminds those gathered in the Temple
that God is at work through the marginalized,
the outliers,
those who live at the edges.

In essence, God is revealed in all humanity
not just the People of Israel.

God has a particular devotion
to the those who are suffering and struggling.

This reminder of God's desire for all is
a hard pill for some to swallow.

This angers the Temple goers
to hear from the One claiming to be the messiah
that they are not a part of God's unfolding narrative.

Their fossilized adherence to the law above all else
obstructs them from engaging in the revelation of God's
New narrative of mercy, justice, and compassion to all.

The narrative which expands on
the liberation and renewal of creation
not just to the people of Israel.

Well, this is not what they want to hear.

They clearly feel entitled to some of
what Jesus has been doing for others
as he has traveled around the Galilean countryside.

After all, he's from their town, their temple,
they've known him all his life.

Surely they, above anyone else,
should benefit from acts
such as those they have heard about.

But Jesus is quick to disabuse them of this notion.

Rather harshly, he lets them know
that God does not act on behalf of those
who demand attention out of a sense of privilege.

God, throughout history, shows that
the work of the divine,
the revelation of the mercy and compassion
that defies understanding,
is told through the lives of those on the edges.

The widows, the poor,
the lepers, the frail and the lost,
the dying children, the oppressed,
and those struggling to survive in the midst
of famine, war and disease.

God divulges the very core
of the narrative of the One who
came in love,
lived out God's love for all creation,
and is love.

Those who live at the edge,
on the margins,
in the shadows,
cry out to us in a language we must strain to hear.

Their voices struggle to rise above
our own preoccupied minds.

They cry out, as did Bartimaeus, the blind beggar,
as Jesus passed by,
"Have mercy....."

"Have mercy on me."

So what do these gospel stories mean for us,
here today?

What can we take from them
and incorporate into our personal lives?

On Thursday, I walked across the street from my office
and was waiting for the light
to walk back across the street
when I noticed a man walking down the block towards me.

And I watched as this man walked
down the block asking those who
passed by for spare change.

In the time it took for the light to change,
16 people passed by this man,
and only 1 person spoke to him.

1 single person.

15 people couldn't even bring
themselves to look at him
and provide a simple response.

He wasn't harassing people,
he wasn't outwardly angry or abusive,
he was very politely asking
if they could spare some change.

That's it.

Mercy, mercy,
have mercy on me.

But those who passed by
apparently could not hear
this cry for whatever reason.

I wonder, how many of us
are able to look the lost,
the unwanted,
those in the shadows and on the edge,
in the face and, at least,
acknowledge their humanity?

Are we able to hear the nearly
10,000 people who have no safe shelter
where they are able to lay their heads at night
as they cry out for compassion and justice?

Do we stop to speak to those
who sleep on our front steps
or behind our bushes when we encounter them?

Can we hear them?

I wonder how God is
calling us to engage with this
crisis in our community?

Maybe we should take notice of
God's call to Jeremiah in our first reading.

The boy, who I picture,
as being astonished that God
would believe he had gifts
that could be employed for the benefit
of God's desire for mercy, justice, and compassion.

Jeremiah says to God,
Surely not me! I'm only a boy.
I don't know how to speak.
I certainly don't know how to speak to power.

But God reassures Jeremiah,
"Don't be afraid of them.
I will be with you."

Because the world can't hear
those in the shadows and on the edge,

I wonder....
are we able to use our voices
to make their needs known?

We all most likely feel like Jeremiah,
feel that we can't possibly be called by
God to address the nations on behalf of God.

To make known the needs, hopes,
and dreams of those who live on the edge.

But are we?

Are we being asked to step in and step up
to address those in positions of power
on behalf of those who will never be heard by them?

What else might we take from
today's readings?

How else might God be calling us
to help in actively engaging in the
work of the renewal of the world?

Paul's letter to the community at Corinth
offers a possible response.

He states that love is the greatest attribute.

It is the focal point of God's desire for creation.

If we do not live our lives
ensuring that the love of God
is made known to those
who desperately need to know
they are loved,
then we have nothing.

Paul tells us
"When I was a child
I spoke like a child.
When I became an adult,
I put away childish ways."

Have we grown fully into our faith?

Is there room for further growth?

Now, Paul's letter is not as
touchy feely and sentimental
as it might seem on the face of it.

Although, as many of you know,
this is often read at weddings
and so has become associated
with romantic love.

But Paul is addressing a community
at odds with each other.

A community that is fighting
and competing and has forgotten the truth
at their center which binds them together.

We grow in faith when we
dare to step out in love
and for love.

And it often times is no easy task.

Our brothers and sisters
need us to open our eyes,
ears and, especially, our hearts.

We all have had the transformative experience
of knowing God's love revealed to us
in a myriad of ways...

Everything we hear in all
three readings today
urges us to share
what we know of God.

To find a way into God's
unfolding narrative
through the lives of those on the margins.

To those who do not know love.

And that way is through
mercy, justice and compassion.

In a word.....love.

The love of God,
realized in acts of mercy, justice and compassion.

I'd like to share an example which
many of us might relate to
as just a few blocks from here
stands a memorial, if you will,
to a woman who lived out
God's call for mercy, justice, and compassion.

Emily Griffith.

The Emily Griffith Technical College,
as it is now called, will turn 100 in September.

100 years ago
a young woman,
who through her life as a teacher,
both in one room school houses
and the public schools of Denver,
realized a dream when the doors
of the Opportunity School opened.

The motto for the Opportunity School,
authored by Emily Griffith,
is still in use today.

For all who wish to learn.

Today, EGTC, still welcomes all people,
regardless of age, race or education,
who desire to expand their horizons
and have a hand in their own success.

The school was a response to
to the conditions of the time.

Denver was teeming with immigrants
who made their way to Denver
in an attempt to realize a better life.

Many had little schooling
and little to no access to
classes to help them learn
English and the skills they
would need to be successful in life.

Today, over 1.5 million students
of all ages, races, and education levels
have passed through the school.

When the school first opened in 1916,
EG was hoping for 200 students.

The first year, there were 1400.

The school stood its ground against
community backlash during
the 1st and 2nd World Wars
and the rise of antagonism against immigrants
from across Europe and Asia.

The school also stood up to the Ku Klux Klan
which was very prevalent in Denver
terrorizing African Americans, as well as,
Catholics and Jews.

EG heard the cries of those
living in the shadows, on the edge,
and opened her heart to them,
embraced them and brought them out of the shadows
to be full participants in the community.

I believe God is calling each of us,
individually and as the community of St. Andrew's,
to take part in God's unfolding narrative.

I also believe
we have what we need
to take our part in God's greatest desire
for all humanity.

I wonder, though,
are we willing to step up and to step out?

Are we willing to open our eyes,
ears and hearts
to those crying, mercy, mercy, have mercy on me.