

Epiphany III Year C

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”

I am not on Facebook, but Katharine is, and because I know her password from time to time I check out what’s going on among the faithful friends of facebook. My colleague and friend Ray Buchanan, the rector of the church of the Redeemer who is on facebook every now and then posts a retro looking, fifties style cartoon entitled “Coffee with Jesus.” It is part parody, part critique; it’s always funny, many times subtle, often edgy, a little irreverent... it takes a critical view of popular Christian culture as well as the hyper individualistic world in which we live. Some might see it as sacrilegious; I think it is insightful and clever, some of it profound. The strip is always just four frames...and the conversation is between Jesus and four other recurring characters, who appear one on one with Jesus (most of them are usually asking Jesus for something)...there’s Jane and Ann, and Carl and Kevin...they all look like they stepped out of a fifties newspaper comic section...and every now and then Satan makes cameo appearances having coffee and conversation with Jesus as well...Satan is an urbane dapper, Mafioso type...Jesus’ character is just as you’d imagine (this is in black and white) the iconic chiseled face, beard, long hair, except he’s wearing a coat and tie...and then he’s always holding a cup of coffee (just so) conversing with one of the aforesaid characters. The latest strip that I saw was entitled “relevant” and I’m going to read it to you: This conversation is with Carl. Carl: There’s a new church starting up in town and it promises to be relevant and different. Think I might try it. Jesus: You keep searching for the perfect fit Carl, but you’re never going to find it. Carl: Then maybe this is a sign that I need to start my own church...the church of Carl. Jesus: Which would fast become a cult, Carl...no, this is a sign that *you* need to be relevant.

I looked up the word relevant in the American Heritage dictionary and the definition was as follows: Having a bearing on or connection with the matter at hand. I believe that is what Luke is telling us in this passage, that the matter at hand is the present coming of God’s commonweal, God’s jubilee, the year of God’s favor. Luke tells us in our passage today what this coming looks like in real terms; he doesn’t leave it to speculation, or project it into a spiritualized utopian future. He has Jesus quoting Isaiah: “We are to bring saving news to the poor, he says; to bring release to the ones held

captive; to give sight to those who can't see both literally and figuratively; to lead the disenfranchised of our world into God's loving and bountiful freedom. Luke is calling us to a profound relevancy... Called to the matters at hand.

Jesus here as always is the archetype of the true human, our true humanity. By the power of the Spirit we are given, as all who have a bearing on or connection with the Good are given, not unlike the Christ, the true human...we are given a powerful relevancy to the matters of our world which will in turn anoint those who lack relevancy...those who feel their life doesn't matter, that their life is irrelevant. We are given to the world to anoint it with dignity which I believe in this context is synonymous to relevancy. Another good word is agency in this context, the power to make change, the power to make things whole.

And Jesus is telling us that the time of connecting to the matters at hand is now...fulfilled in our hearing, he says. Over the centuries the church has made Jesus an idol, an icon set apart from the human community. And I believe that has enabled the church to abdicate its responsibility to and for our world...let's just turn it over to Jesus...but Jesus has turned it over to us. The same Spirit that rests upon Jesus rests upon us, and gives us the same authority and power to act on God's behalf...That is what incarnation means when all is said and done...that we are Christ's body and blood in the world to redeem it from the abasement and evil that besets it...we are like the one we follow... fully human and fully divine...walking in the relevant and present light of God.

The long and the short of Luke's gospel is that this so-called day of God's favor is all about freedom...liberation...liberation from that to which we are held captive, like depression, fear and despair...and liberation for our brothers and sisters who are our neighbors who suffer injustice and oppression and violence...our neighbors, all essential members of the one body of which Paul so eloquently speaks in his letter to the church in Corinth...when one such member suffers then the entire body suffers...the body of Christ, one living and breathing organism inhabited by God's very Spirit...so our high call...the matter at hand is to set free those who are captive...to let people know that there is hope, that there is love... to bear the good news that freedom will reign, and reign soon. Dear faithful friends of God, the Spirit of the Lord is upon us...let us live into our calling, our true nature. Fulfillment is nigh... now... now is the time...and nothing could be more relevant.