



Embrace Christ's Mission

Luke 4:14-21

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to
the poor. . .*

*The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on
him.*

*He began by saying to them,
"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

January 24, 2016

Thought for the Week

Scriptures: Nehemiah 8: 2-4a, -6, 8-10, Corinthians 12: 12-30, Luke: 1: 1-4, 14-21

Perhaps it does not occur to many today that they are literally captured by the words of other people. They may have no other option or choose not to make a choice about this problem. Think about the amount of time many people spend watching the news channels, CNN, for example, or MSNBC: such programming goes on 24/7. Many people may even feel deprived if they have missed the evening news or their favorite commentator. Are we simply caught up in the ingrained habits of the times or too timid to make our own decisions about what has critical importance in the daily secular patterns of life today?

But even more to the point, could this unthinking daily habit even overlay the habits of many Christians as they flock to their individual churches each Sunday? Odd as it may seem, they are in somewhat the same situation as they were in their living room at home. In this instance they are now listening to another person trying to convince them that what is being said is of critical importance in their lives. And then what happens? Oftentimes people do exactly what they do while watching CNN: they let it all go by without making any sort of intelligent, critical evaluation of it. In other words, what often happens in our every day experience of life continues when they are seated in church listening to their pastor or other minister. Seemingly, there is so much information to absorb each day, secular and sacred, that they have simply stopped listening or internalizing it.

Could that be why people in some churches are found checking the Sunday NFL scores on their iPhones, reading the pastor's column in the Sunday bulletin or even turning up their shirt cuff to glance stealthily at their wrist watch? And all this while the sermon is being preached!

I believe that these are legitimate concerns. Something serious is happening to our attention span regarding the things that are most important to our lives,

Compare all that I have said thus far to two incidents in the scriptures for this Sunday. The first comes from the Hebrew Book of Nehemiah. The context is this: the Jewish people had not heard the proclamation of the Scriptures for many years. At a certain point, a lost scroll was discovered: a call went out to folks near and far to hear God's word once again, perhaps for the first time.

Ezra, the priest scribe was chosen to stand on a high platform before all the people, read the text and interpret it for them. As

Ezra began to read, the people became so overwhelmed by what they heard that they fell to their knees and wept. Ezra, however, urged them to stand and lift up their voices in ecstatic joy because God's living Word was once again being proclaimed in their presence.

I wanted to cite that passage as a contrast to the way we Christians often respond when the word of God is proclaimed and preached on the Lord's Day. Could it be said that Christians may have become so desensitized to the power of the Scriptures and its interpretation that in many cases people have simply ceased trying to discover its depth and its effect on their lives. Deep-seated habits are often difficult to eradicate.

The second example comes from the Gospel of Luke and describes an event as Jesus returned to his home synagogue and offered to preach on a text from the prophet Isaiah. The hometown folks, of course, had already heard of his preaching renown in other villages. When Jesus had finished reading from the text of Isaiah, He laid the scroll aside and began by saying that what the prophet had proclaimed centuries earlier, he was now applying to himself as a new prophet for a new age! The people in the synagogue immediately became incensed at such "arrogance." They cast him out of the synagogue and asked him never to return.

Odd as it may sound, such a situation has often occurred in Christian communities of our day when a certain well-known preacher comes to a church, proclaims the scriptures and interprets it in a way that seems to challenge certain local political or social issues. Once again, some congregants may well take offense at a preacher who crosses the border between the secular and the sacred. In short, preaching can occasionally become a treacherous undertaking.

All of this leads me to say that the proclamation of Scripture can often be a harsh and dreadful challenge to us who claim to be believers. However, before challenging the Word or the preacher, it might be advisable to reflect on the way home and think again on what was heard, dissecting it in our own way in our own time.

Happy Birthday- Wayne (1/28)

Prayer Thought - Libya

Gracious God, you are the way of peace. Come into the brokenness of our lives and our lands with your healing love. Restore us with your grace and strengthen us to serve in your world wherever there is need.

God of mercy, we seek your forgiveness for that which separates us from you and from one another. May your love, through us, bring hope and healing where intolerance and indifference lead to unjust suffering.

This day we pray for the country of Libya. May the people and their leaders know and teach peace.

We uphold all who passionately engage in the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ. Guide and bless all who seek a deeper understanding of your will as individuals and as sacred community.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ who has taught us of your peace. Amen.

Stewardship Thought

*"Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks,
and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared..." (Nehemiah 8:10)*

Ezra's instructions to the people show us that God does not forbid us from enjoying the good things in life; he wants us to be happy! However, He expects us to generously share our blessings with those who are in need, without expecting anything in return.