

“A Shared Commitment”
Sunday, January 27, 2019
Stouffville United Church

1 Corinthians 12 and Luke 4:14-30

Aldous Huxley, the science fiction writer wrote this about prophets: “The most distressing thing that can happen to a prophet is to be proved wrong. The next most distressing thing is to be proved right.”

Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been raised as a child and went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read from the scroll of Isaiah and eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. All spoke well of him (going well so far). They were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth (going well so far). They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” (a seed of doubt sown) And then comes the twist. There seems to be a growing assumption amongst the people that Jesus will do wonderful things for them just because he grew up with them. To which Jesus now says, ‘think again’ (and things take a turn for the worse from here on in).

The people in the synagogue on that day didn’t like what they were hearing – that Jesus had no intention of coming to their aid but rather held up to them the example of the great prophets Elijah and Elisha who redeemed not the people of Israel, but rather went to the aid of outsiders – the widow in Sidon and Naaman, the Syrian army commander. Jesus was not planning on sticking around to make them look better.

What they failed to hear was what Jesus said after he sat down after rolling the scroll back up. Verse 20: “And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Our scripture text is saturated with the presence of the Holy Spirit. Luke 4:1 tells us that Jesus was ‘full of the Holy Spirit’ and ‘was led by the Spirit in the wilderness’. After his forty days in the wilderness and his temptation by the devil, he returns to Galilee ‘in the power of the Spirit’ and reads from the scroll of Isaiah that ‘the Spirit of the Lord is upon me.’ After reading from the scroll, Jesus sits down and says, ‘Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’ His ministry was beginning on that very day, not in some time in the future, but that day and it calling him to bring good news to the poor, to release the captives, to recover the sight of the blind, to free the oppressed.”

But it’s as if no one got it. It’s as if no one understood the magnitude of what this man was announcing to the world. The towns people that he grew up with seemed focused on was ‘what’s in it for me?’ And then when they heard his answer, ‘Nothing’, they drove Jesus out of town. When they heard he’d be helping foreigners, and people who were not like them, they tried to push him off the cliff.

Clearly not everyone was on the same page.

Thankfully, the apostle Paul offers help in his powerful image from 1 Corinthians 12. Our passage from 1 Corinthians 12 offers one of the most famous metaphors in the history of Christianity¹. Often people find it difficult to name their place in the church, but when asked to think of themselves as a part of a body, everyone, children and adults of all ages have no trouble identifying themselves as hands, feet, brains, and yes, even funny bones!²

Over time, the idea of the church as the body of Christ has been understood in different ways. As a commentary notes: “For some it suggests a unity closely associated with the church’s sacramental life. For others it suggests a oneness born of common religious experience, for others a solidarity rooted in a shared participation in Christ-like-action, and for others a unity linked to a common confession of faith or witness.”³

It is a vision of a church, that is not a building but rather a body of people, caring for one another, and sharing the work of God in the world.⁴ The challenge is to build a community where as Paul writes in verse 25: “there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.” Reality is though that there will always be differing opinions, experiences, priorities and needs. It is better to name them, recognize them, and use them as strengths to build on, and not weaknesses or inadequacies to complain about, or worse yet, pretend everyone is on the same page.⁵

A commentary reflects on this: “This is the dynamic that Edwin Friedman refers to as “togetherness pressures,” when the positive desire for closeness and connection is turned into pressure to conform in some false unity. In systems theory, this pressure makes the congregation very vulnerable to anxiety when there is any kind of change. Changes in leadership, in membership (increase or decrease), in the buildings or the surrounding neighbourhood, can make individual members of the church anxious.”⁶ As Fred Craddock wrote, “Oneness does not mean sameness. Unity does not mean uniformity.”⁷

The Rev. Joan Gray, moderator of the 217th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) has commented, “When you really think about it, this power of the Spirit is the only thing the early church had going for it. It had no buildings, no budget, no paid staff, and very few members. The opposite situation may face us: we have buildings, budgets, staff, and members, but do we have the power of the Holy Spirit? How can we know if we have it?”⁸

So how can we know that we have the power of the Spirit here at Stouffville United Church? We know because the Holy Spirit gives us something to do for God, and a time to do it. There is a sense of urgency in Jesus’ mission. He finished reading, rolled up the scroll, gave it to the attendant, sat down, and with all eyes upon him said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled

¹ Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 1, Theological Perspective, 278.

² *Ibid.*, Homiletical Perspective, 279.

³ *Ibid.*, Theological Perspective, 282.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Homiletical Perspective, 279.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Pastoral Perspective, 280.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Pastoral Perspective, 280

⁷ Preaching Through the Christian Year, Year C, 87.

⁸ Feasting on the word, Year C, Vol 1, Pastoral Perspective, 284.

in your hearing.” The time of God’s Holy Spirit is today, right now.⁹ The Holy Spirit comes when we have something to do for God and a time to do it.¹⁰

As my friend and theologian Hendrik Hart says, “Without a body of Christ, God's love in Christ remains invisible in our world.”

It is our calling to be the body of Christ in this world. And it is our hearts that will hear the voice of the Spirit calling us forward to share the work of God in this world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Pastoral Perspective, 284.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Pastoral Perspective, 288.