

“May the words of my mouth and
the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable and pleasing to you, O Lord.”
AMEN!

There was a cartoon in a magazine
some years back that showed three men
sitting at a table.

One was dressed in a flowing white robe
with a halo of light surrounding him.

The second was barely dressed.
He was beaten and battered;
a crown of thorns circled his head.

The third was dark skinned with curly hair.
So average in appearance that one might
pass him on the road and not look twice.

The voice from the crowd asked,
“Will the REAL Jesus Christ please stand.” :-)

It doesn't come as a shock to us
to understand that people see Jesus
from different angles.

It's fact!

Even the gospel writers define
Jesus in unique ways.

In Mathew, Jesus is a great teacher of righteousness,
sort of like Moses.

In Mark, Jesus is a cosmic battler for
good and against evil.

He exorcised evil demons and it was evil
that nailed him to the cross and good
that raised him from the dead
turning him loose in the world.

John's Gospel tells us that
Jesus came to reveal God.

“Only Jesus has seen God and when
we see Jesus we see the Almighty.”

Luke, the gospel we read today,
best summarizes Jesus as a prophet,
but not the kind that has a crystal ball or
one who predicts the future with cards.

Not the prophet that shouts “The end is near!”

But the prophet who comes speaking God's truth.

It's interesting, I think, the ways
we see Jesus from different angles.

How does He save?

How does he heal?

How does He come back to life and
send forth the Spirit?

What does Jesus look like?

We work to answer these questions,
but Jesus (in the variety of ways we picture Him)
is really most concerned with what's going
on in here (point to heart) and

about what comes out here (mouth) and
about what we do with these (hands and feet).

In essence, what do WE look like? (Pause)

So how would you describe yourself?

Usually when asked that question
we may describe our gender and
physical appearance:
short, tall, stocky, skinny.

Maybe even mention what we do for a living.

But, Jesus doesn't really care
about any of those descriptions.

Jesus wants to know, if we know
what our true essence is and
if we can identify it.

The Spirit beckons us to answer and
that's where it gets a lot more complicated.

Mm, uhh...

I tried to ask myself the question and
it took some time to find
the essential self descriptions.

With some help, I found it to be easier
to identify myself with metaphor images.

I'm a rollercoaster, sometimes up
and sometimes down.

I'm a pin cushion.

Useful and safe, but I feel pricked when
someone does something hurtful or

when I behave poorly.

Dirt is a good metaphor to describe myself.

Natural, it's needed for things to grow,
but also something that can make a mess. :-)

It occurred to me when I wrote that line
that I don't like to make messes, but
Jesus never had that problem.

He made messes that helped people grow
and his messes still help us grow. (Pause)

Jesus' message in today's gospel is
the start of a pretty big mess.

The prophet Jesus, after reading the
section of Isaiah to his hometown
worship community,

sat down and said, "Today this scripture
has been fulfilled in your hearing."

It is easy to read over that without it sinking in.

But, it's striking because he didn't say
"Yesterday, the scripture was fulfilled," nor
did he say,

“Tomorrow, the scripture will be fulfilled.”

No, it's today, just like the scripture is revealed “Today, in your hearing.”

And it was after he said those words when everyone began to speak well of Jesus, at least for a short period of time,

because hearing that Jesus brings good news to the poor and oppressed is a high point of the rollercoaster and the removal of stick pins and his words are fertile soil when

we are thinking it's for us, but what happens when we find Jesus is identifying gospel news to those who are not “us.”

Will we, like the people of Nazareth, cart Jesus up a hill to throw him off? Hmm

That's next week's text, but it's not too early to say that's exactly what many Christians in North America are doing today.

In the name of God, they are throwing Jesus off a cliff.

“Today, the scriptures have been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Not because I’m Jesus, but because I’ve been a part of the problem.

And if we can admit that, if we can accept that the person we are today is different than the person we were yesterday, then there’s hope.

Who here is a different person than they were at 10 years old, 18 years old, 35 years old?

I know you’re all raising your hands. :-)

All of us are transformed people.

Each one has had different journeys but have come to grow, mature, and become more fulfilled.

In differing ways we have each experienced poverty (physical and emotional).

In differing ways we have each been oppressed.

That is humiliated by violence (physical and emotional).

We have been the bearers of this AND
we know all this while perceiving that others
have received poverty and humiliation in
more severe ways that we have.

If we think it is only us, us, us...
then we will become like the hometown
Nazarenes and want to throw Jesus off
a cliff when he speaks
his prophetic words.

There's confirmation from archeologists that
Nazareth was a poor, small town community.

Surely, they were humiliated by kings and
oppressed by people who had power, but
they forgot there's always someone
worse off than they are.

Let us not forget that truth today
because while we have become
transformed people, we (and others)
are still transforming. (Pause)

Today is that annual celebration when
we recognize the many years that
this congregation has partnered

with Reconciling in Christ Ministries.

During this time of transformation,
we name the discrimination and pain caused
by the church upon the LGBTQ+ community.

The church, as a whole, can still do better.

We must not stop making improvements
for full welcome and unity.

It is done by proclaiming Jesus' words of
good news not only for our own ears
but for those who's world is even
more a mess than ours.

For those who we once thought
were less than or different. (Pause)

Since we agree that we see Jesus
from different angles,

one day we will agree that it's okay, even Godly,
to see people at different angles and let it be.

For "God arranged the members in the body,
each of them, as God chose."

Paul said, "No part of the body can say,

“I have no need for you.”

And these words,

“Those members of the body we think
are less honorable we cloth
with greater honor.”

And later, “If one suffers, we all suffer.” (Pause)

When Jesus read from the Isaiah scroll
he made a public proclamation about himself.

He named himself anointed and
then clearly provided his mission:

to proclaim the good news to the poor,
release the captives
(that is, release to those who are serving
as slaves because of
indebtedness or prejudice),

bringing sight to the blind (both physical and spiritual)
and letting the oppressed go free.

Since we follow Jesus,
we will do the same things and
be transformed by the promise of God’s love.

AMEN!