

A Sermon by the Very Rev. Dr. Renée Tembeckjian

Trinity Episcopal Church

23 January 2022

Epiphany 3C: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4: 14-21

“Body Language”

As a psychologist, I was trained to observe and consider all the ways in which a person communicates. After all, what we say is not always the whole of what we convey. We also express ourselves nonverbally – consciously or unconsciously – through gesture and movement. You know the popular term – it’s called Body Language. And today’s lessons are all about it...

...where a first-century carpenter’s son uses his eyes, not to measure a length of wood, but to read scripture. His voice is not calling to a fellow worker on the job, but is teaching in the synagogue. As for his ears, well, they are hearing praise (for now). And his hands are not hammering nails, but reaching for an ancient scroll of parchment.

That scroll from which Jesus reads aloud in the synagogue, is from the prophet Isaiah:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.*

And then, in a stunning or even brazen-sounding pronouncement, Jesus adds this:

Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

What has been fulfilled in their hearing? Just who does Jesus understand himself to be? What does he understand about his relationship to God, that he would speak so plainly and confidently in public, that he would set a course and stay so true, that he would offer his very life rather than betray it? Just what does Jesus understand?

What he understands is *himself*. With his eyes and ears, with his feet, voice and hands, with his head and heart and spirit, by his every word and choice, Jesus embodies God’s love so utterly and wholly that we can see it and hear it with *our* own eyes and ears.

What Jesus understands is the call to embody God’s love in the world...

...and *we* are called to understand *ourselves* and that same call – the one Jesus read from the scroll of the prophet on that first century day. *We* are to proclaim the time of the Lord’s favor on behalf of those who suffer just as Isaiah described – those for whom the light of justice, mercy, honor, and hope are horribly, wrongfully, and painfully denied.

But how? By faithfully and courageously and honestly exercising our own gifts from the wonderfully rich variety the Spirit breathes into life.

As St. Paul reminds us, that same Spirit authors many gifts and inspires varied human pathways. We are teachers, health care workers, lawmakers, laborers, cooks, and caregivers. We are shopkeepers, office workers, and community servants. We have ears to listen with compassion, knees which bend in prayer, hands and voices for creative expression *and* for speaking on behalf of others...

Taken together, verbally *and* nonverbally, actively and faithfully deployed, we embody God's dream of a just and peaceable kingdom – not only in some future paradise, but here and now, in our midst, on this earth, in our time.

And that is not merely “body language” – that is Body of *Christ* language...

...because the Christ can only have hands today if we offer *our* hands. The Christ can only have a living heart today if we offer *our* love. The Christ can only have a voice today if *we* are willing to speak out, especially on behalf of those same ones Isaiah named in that ancient scroll:

The Poor: Not only in the material, but in poverty of *spirit* – discouragement, anxiety, envy, sorrow.

The Captive: Not only bondage of place, but of *mind* – longing for freedom from whatever distorts our wholeness including the bondage of fear, greed, and literalism.

The Blind: Not only lacking eyesight, but insight – where anger, suspicion or willfulness raises denial over wisdom, superstition over science, preference over evidence.

The Oppressed: Not only in faraway places and circumstances, but wherever intimidation and the fear of repercussion – institutionally or personally – crushes our hope or constrains our movement.

Together, we are called as a sacred body to proclaim the Lord's favor on behalf of these.



So, who do you understand *yourself* to be within the body of Christ? What is *your* role, your part, in the embodiment of God's kingdom? Whatever it is, it matters. It is needed:

...because the body does not exist of one member, but of many.
If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?
If the whole body were hearing, where would be the sense of smell?

Together, we can create a living Body – through which every word, breath, prayer, and action expresses the language of Love—love of God and love of neighbor. And if we will and when we do, then *we* might even dare to proclaim, as Jesus did...

...that the scripture is fulfilled today in *our* hearing.

Amen.