

The church is Epiphany. We are the Magi, searching, resplendent in this world's accouterments of knowledge and wealth and achievement. But we search for something more, And---of all unlikely places---in a stable the Deity appears. The birthing of our Lord bursts in upon our ordinary lives like fireworks in the snow. Only God would send a little baby King, and we are on our knees, where we are within reach of our full personhood.

Luke 4:14-21

Jesus returned to Galilee powerful in the Spirit. News that he was back spread through the countryside. He taught in their meeting places to everyone's acclaim and pleasure. He came to Nazareth where he had been reared. As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place. When he stood up to read he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written, "God's Spirit is on me; He's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor. Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind. To set the burdened and battered free. To announce, "This is God's year to act!" He rolled up the scroll handed it back to the assistant and sat down. Every eye in the place was on him, intent. Then he started in, "You've just heard Scripture make history. It came true just now in this place." (Message)



"Because Actions Speak Louder Than Words"

One day,  
Youngsters will learn words they will not understand  
Children from India will ask:  
What is hunger?  
Children from Alabama will ask:  
What is racial segregation?  
Children from Hiroshima will ask:  
What is the atomic bomb?  
Children at school will ask:  
What is war?  
You will answer them:  
Those words are not used any more  
Like stage coaches, galleys or slavery  
Words no longer meaningful,  
That is why they have been removed from dictionaries.  
Martin Luther King, Jr.

A couple of weeks ago on my way home from Cora's home I saw scripture come alive in a 'first on the scene' emergency situation. Four motorists had jumped out of their cars to tend to a man who was lying in the middle of the road. One woman had called 911; another was running to get a blanket from her car; another was making his head comfortable; another was trying to help him awaken from an unconscious state. Within minutes the WB Ambulance and Police arrived on the scene and headed him off to the hospital. It made my heart glad to witness the selfless, compassionate care given by those first responders to a stranger who needed help. It made me think of Jesus' Good Samaritan parable and smile widely at catching a glimpse of the activated Spirit of God. Then I wondered about our culture that speaks of first responders and heroes, but rarely of saints. One day, will the children ask: "What does Good Samaritan mean"? And, if they ask, how will we answer them?

In the devotional, 'Know Your Bible', Rev. Quinn Caldwell wrote: 'If God busted into your house today and did something cool, would you know enough scripture to tell the people around you what it means? If God came into your life and worked a miracle of healing, or service, or generosity, or peace, would you know enough scripture to tell yourself what it means? Part of the Christian life is being able to recognize God at work in the world, and to do that, you need to know the writings the ancestors left for you. . . . Whenever God enters the world, there is always someone right there ready with a human explanation. And most people will believe them---unless there's someone around who knows enough to tell them the sacred truth.'

One day, Jesus stood up among his peers, quoted scripture from the prophet Isaiah, and explained to them what Isaiah's Word from God meant.

First he said: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me'. Here he made the bold claim that the public ministry in which he was about to engage was not fueled by self will but rather by the Divine Energies of God.

Next, he clarified the boundaries of the social justice work which would qualify him as the Lord's Messiah. (God's Human One who would save God's people from their sin of breaking covenant with Yahweh). Jesus said that he was empowered and sent by the Reconciling Spirit of God . . .

To bring good news to the poor;  
To announce pardon to the prisoners;  
To recover sight to the blind;  
To set the burdened and battered free!

Lastly, he issued a 'save the date' announcement which gave the notice that: "God will be acting this year"!

Today is our 2016 Annual Meeting, our Year for getting on board with the prophetic actions of our Shepherding Messiah. In preparation for our time together, be pleased to hear again these words from Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador about commitment making: "It helps now and then, to step back and take the long view. The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. We plant seeds that one day will grow. We lay foundations that will need further development. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning . . . an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builder; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own."

Annual Meeting. In the congregational way of our Protestant forbears of faith, it is our time for organizing selves according the democratic principle of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. We meet as equals with differing gifts to offer in service to the Lord for the purpose of sustaining this non-authoritarian, non-hierarchal community of faith. In the covenantal way of our Pilgrim fore-bears, it's our time for growing in faith by making specific and personal pledges of our time, talents, and treasures of money towards the various ministries of First Church, 29 Howard Street, West Bridgewater. And, in the way of 'come to Jesus, altar call promising', it's our time of Sabbath change that occurs as we pray over that community shaping, life transforming question: 'How will 2016 be God's Year's to act in and through us?

Prayer. God, make your scriptures to sink so deep into us that we cannot see the world except through them. Amen.