

Message for 1-23-22

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*'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 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.' All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. (Luke 4)

Karen has rightly pointed out and emphasized that Jesus left unread and unsaid the second part of the last sentence. In Isaiah 61 the last verse reads "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God." Jesus leaves out the part about vengeance.

*We covenant one with another to be that sensitive and responsive part of human society which perceives and responds to God's newest thrust in the midst of history. The uniqueness and greatness of every life is radically affirmed. Our task together demands a comprehensive view of life, always pointed intentionally to the future. **Our life together involves us individually and corporately in study and worship, always maintaining a proper balance between proclamation of the Word about life with the deeds which make life good.** Those activities which eliminate age barriers, cut across religious dogma, reduce cultural parochialisms, and engage secular people with life's ultimate possibilities will be worthy of our best efforts.*

This Word About Life is the vision and mission statement of Jesus. Jesus' vision was to proclaim and make economic, political, and social justice realities, by using

the vision of the year of Jubilee, to call on all people to push the reset button and make all the inequities of the accumulated years, endured by generations, go away, and allow all the people to start over with renewed hearts and minds.

The capitalist argument against Jubilee, the year of God's favor, and the forgiveness of debt is often articulated in this way. If you forgave all the debt and made everyone equal, we would be right back where we started in five years. The subtext of this argument is that some people have the strength of character to make it and some do not.

What people forget is that part about renewed hearts and minds. People who struggle with responsibility would mature and people who make excuses to not show compassion or justice would grow in their capacity to love and be generous. Which one are we? I think I know.

The way the vision is to be fulfilled is through an intimacy with the transforming Spirit of Life and Love and through the missions of bringing good news to the poor, release to the captives, healing to the blind and lame, and the lifting of oppression from the oppressed.

Let me state the vision and mission of Jesus again in another way. The vision is the restoration, reconciliation, and healing of all people, and the way to do this are the missions that reverse all the cruel and unjust practices of individuals and institutions.

For example, Jesus did not feed the hungry people just because he was a nice guy. Feeding people was a way of reversing the cruel and unjust practices that made some people starve and others hoard food. The story of Jesus feeding the multitude is a story of vision and mission. The people sharing, having their fill, and collecting the excess for later distribution was an incarnation of the vision of the new creation. It was living out the year of God's favor and doing so without the vengeance.

The vision and its relationship to the missions and works of Jesus ministry are wonderful in themselves but it is the relationship of vision to mission that I want to focus on this morning. Healing the world is a great vision but **how** do we do it? The relationship between vision and mission is in our own Covenant statement. Proclamation of the Word About Life and making life good is the vision. Radically affirming every human being and performing deeds and activities that are worthy

of our best efforts is how we make the vision real in our world. Vision is where we are going, and mission is how we get there.

For example, proclaiming that a good and abundant life for marginalized people (take your pick, LGBT persons, our immigrant neighbor, the hungry and the poor) is our vision and offering food assistance to the people of Pastor Francis' church, open and affirming status to our friend Carol Shipman, sanctuary and advocacy to families living in fear of being separated, are the missions.

Our staff, board members, members and friends of our congregation have been working with many starts and stops on clarifying Shadow Rock's vision and mission. I have an inch and a half notebook filled with documents outlining the process starting September 2018. If you can endure it I will be happy to review it with you.

Here are some conclusions I have come to. A congregation with congregational polity makes everything better and more difficult at the same time. I like who we are and that every person is a partner in ministry but there are times it would be easier if you just did what I told you. We are a diverse congregation, and we are all over the place with our ideas and our passions. We have talked with outside experts who have their own biases and models that they try to fit us into. Some of their ideas are good and some of their ideas are like trying to put a round Shadow Rock peg into an organizational and theological square hole. We have different motivations and assumptions about the purpose of the church and the world we are in. We have different views regarding how to make the best kept secret of our fellowship not be such a secret. The list includes advertising, word of mouth, being true to our vision and mission, updating the website, using social media, the internet, knocking on doors, and inviting our friends and neighbors. Some of our leaders think that clarity of vision and mission is essential for our future and others who have gone through this process many times in their secular careers are not so sure.

What do I think? I think we have clarity and I think it would be good to take the collective wisdom and experiences of our people and the last three years, make a statement, put a bow on it, and move on. To this end the board brings to your consideration the following ambition statement:

To create a world /where every person is radically affirmed,/ and barriers between people/ become bridges/ of inclusion, justice, and spirituality.

The board discussed last Tuesday about voting on this statement. I encouraged them not to vote on it but present it to the congregation, wear it like a pair of new shoes, talk about it, see if we can live into it and see if the life we live together is truly reflected by these words.

I think it is. I take the long view of this stuff. I appreciate all the work and tender care given by everyone but I hear our Word About Life and I think it is Shadow Rock it is talking about.

‘The Spirit of Life and Love is upon us,
because God has anointed us
to bring good news to the poor.

The Source of Life and Love has sent us to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,
and without anger, rancor, vengeance and violence to proclaim the year of the
Lord’s favor.’

To say it another way,

To create a world /where every person is radically affirmed,/ and barriers between people/ become bridges/ of inclusion, justice, and spirituality.

