

3rd Sunday in Ordinary time

January 23, 2022

Reflection by Sister Patricia Crowley, OSB

Nehemiah 8:2-4a, 5-6, 8-19; I Corinthians 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-2

Today's readings speak of call and speak of today!

Nehemiah, with Ezra, helped the people to maintain their identity during a very difficult period in their history. He was dedicated to his people and to God as a layman credited with rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. This book is his memoir. This selection calls the people to remember their heritage. It was a moment of hope for them.

In the second reading, Paul calls the early Christian community in Corinth to remember who they are as members of the body of Christ. This is, with next week's reading from Chapter 13, one of the most recognized parts, of the epistles.

Luke, the only non-Jew among the evangelists, opens his gospel by explaining how he went about writing what he did. Then, today's gospel skips to chapter 4 and the beginning of the public ministry with a poignant story of Jesus in his hometown synagogue. This scene crystallizes the call he is experiencing as he begins his public life.

So, the question for us today is - to what is God calling us as a church, as a community, as individuals?

Calls come to us in many different ways - through what we read, what we experience, in prayer, in lectio, in another's words, in the meanderings of our own hearts, in an expressed need, in recognition of our own gifts, in facing our own limitations, and so many other ways!

This past week I read an article by Amanda Gorman describing her call to be the 2021 Inaugural Poet. She describes her fear as she was approaching the event:

....I was scared before the inauguration invitation and I almost withdrew.

She asked herself, "Is this poem worth it?"

Her reflection on her own feelings:

"I look at fear not as cowardice but as a call forward, a summons to fight for what we hold dear."

I am the daughter of Black writers. We're descended from freedom fighters who broke their chains and they changed the world. They call me

She went on to say....

"...yet fear can be love trying its best in the dark."

So, our emotions, if we pay attention to them, can also call us to something new each day of our lives.....

All human beings are called and each one to something unique to that person.

Listening to a call can be complicated.

I remember a story that Father Bill Keaneally told once about being called by the Personnel Board to become the pastor at a parish in Blue Island. He said, “Where is that?” and “Can I get back to you?” The board member said, “Yes, but you are the only one who would be able to help this parish grow. Think about that!”

He then told his current pastor about the conversation and that priest said “Say no, don’t do this.” Bill listened to him and did just that.

A week or so later, he heard that a friend of his had been assigned to that same parish so bill called to congratulate him. His friend said, “They told me I was the only one who would be able to help this parish grow.” Bill repeated his congratulations.

Not every invitation is a call (Speaking as one who has trouble saying “no” to invitations, I can attest to that.....).

Unrolled the scroll

Looking more closely at the gospel passage from Luke, we might discover some other aspects of call for our own lives.

“He unrolled the scroll and found the passage.” I found myself wondering:

- Does that mean that he looked for it and found it?
- or, perhaps, that it was right there when he opened the scroll?

Whichever it was, it could be a call that warrants our good listening for calls come in many ways..... when we search for what feels ‘right’ for us and also when something presents itself to us and we immediately resonate with it.

In this instance, according to Luke, Jesus’ call comes through the words of the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit of God “has anointed me...” for a purpose – and that purpose is stated as:

- *to bring glad tidings to those who are poor,*
- *To proclaim liberty to captives,*
- *And recovery of sight to the blind,*
- *To let the oppressed go free.*

As people who claim to follow Christ and who, according to Paul in the second reading, are members of his Body, our call, in some way unique to each of us, is to do the same.

Rolled it back up

*Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant
and sat down,*

At times, when we hear a call that seems clear to us, we need to “sit down” and just be with what we heard. People around us, as those in Nazareth, will undoubtedly have varying reactions. We know, in Jesus’ case, that the people of Nazareth did as they realized this was the son of the people next door and they wondered. Some of them even got angry at the seeming arrogance of this young man standing and now, sitting before them in the synagogue. But that is for next Sunday’s gospel reflection not today’s!

Today’s passage simply says that Jesus spoke to them saying:

*Today this Scripture passage
is fulfilled in your hearing.*

At times when we hear an authentic call, we shrink from it because we feel unworthy or incapable or inadequate.

Henry Nouwen’s concept of the “wounded healer” might shed some light on that momentary reaction. You may remember him talking about the greeters who welcomed pilgrims to the old city of Jerusalem at the city gate, people coming tired and scarred, and in need of some comfort. He speaks of one woman who herself wore bandages and who would pause periodically to put ointment on her wounds. She knew that she herself needed healing. And... She more than any others of the “greeters” was able to genuinely welcome the troubled and aching pilgrims. *These greeters offered the pilgrims directions, support, immediate services if needed, and sometimes healing ointment as they made their way into the heart of the City. Many of those entering the city had bandages from wounds or cuts suffered along the way. It was only the wounded healer who could touch her own wounds, who on a daily basis kept offering the much needed service and healing of all those entering through the gate.*

Today

Let’s focus for a moment on that word “Today”.

Tich Nhat Hahn, the well known Buddhist monk, who died yesterday, taught about mindfulness which he described as:

getting in touch with the present moment

His poem entitled - “Please Call Me By My True Names” begins by saying:

Do not say that I’ll depart tomorrow
because even today I still arrive.

He goes on to say that he is a part of everything that is on this earth – from a tiny bird to a jewel in a stone, the frog in the pond, the child in Uganda, the 12 year old refugee who is raped, the pirate who is guilty of that, etc. each day.

*The rhythm of my heart is the birth and
death of all that are alive.*

*Please call me by my true names,
so I can hear all my cries and laughs at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.*

Thich Nhat Hanh

Jesus in this passage says that Today, Now, this call is fulfilled.... That is to what we are called:
for Mindfulness is being awake to the present moment.

Conclusion

This past week two “greats” died and their words and response to a call are fitting reflections on these Scripture passages:

- Tich Nhat Hahn as I just quoted and....
- Jim Forest: “Shape your life on truth....live it as courageously as you can and count on God to make some good of it.”

So, the question for us is - to what is God calling us as church, as community, as unique individuals TODAY?