

The Joy of the Lord is Your Strength
January 23, 2022, Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel of Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21
Fr. Brad

Both the first reading and the Gospel emphasize **the power of the preached word**. The Jews, Muslims, and Christians all do it...all gather the people to worship the living God, and it includes having someone read from an old book of ancient writings. They read from it to know who they are and what they are doing.

In the first reading, the Jews, newly returned from exile in Babylon, are now in Jerusalem facing the massive rebuilding that needs to happen at so many levels. The priest Ezra addresses the people of Judah some 80 years after the return from Babylonian captivity. They are still trying to build a common life for the people. **While they listened to Ezra, they found themselves weeping**. Everything around them was so far from what it ought to be - - from what God planned it to be and for what they themselves wanted it to be.

They had been in exile for over 50 years and then over many more years, faced with the mammoth task of physically **rebuilding a destroyed city**, a temple for worship, and **rebuilding a culture that would be true to their original faith** and to their identity as God's chosen.

We look at the mess we have made of the earth today and it is no wonder why we might well be discouraged. We look at the way our natural environment has been taken for granted...we look at the distrust between nations and governments...we look at the infighting within governments. We see the Church itself, called to be a guiding light to the world (not so different than the call of the Jews - - to be a light to the nations) and how divided it is within itself and how much it has been infected with abuse and corruption, cover up and ignorance over its long term and recent history.

And it seems the world cannot agree on how to best deal with this pandemic. When we look at all these things, **we too might well be 'minded to weep,'** as Nehemiah says.

And we note in our **second reading** that Paul speaks of **the unity of the body** in spite of all its differences.

In the very community of Corinth to whom he was speaking **there was dualistic thinking**, neglect of the poor and **a growing divide among the people**.

It speaks to our world today, reminding us that **we have lost touch** with the ways in which we are in fact one body.

Yet, the last line of the first reading after speaking of the people minded to weep is, *'for this day is holy to the Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'*

What could possibly be joyful about the state of things in this world today? We are taught that being strong is about grim determination and hard work. **But the reading clearly states that 'it is in our joy that our strength lies.'**

Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and when it comes to dwell within, it powers us to be joyful and face all that the world throws at us

It is not an external circumstance that will bring us true joy.

There is the story of the woman who laments, 'First I was dying to finish grade school so I could start college. Then I was dying to finish college so I could start work. Then I was dying for the children to be old enough to attend school so I could get back to work. Then, I was dying to retire. And now, I am dying. Suddenly, it dawned on me that I forgot to live each day.'

This is certainly a lesson in we can all relate to.

In the Gospel, Jesus asserts his mission which is **to rebuild the hearts of the people, not just their city**, to return them to God, who is their real home. Jesus boldly proclaims the great supplement to Isaiah's passage....that the scripture as he read it, **was being fulfilled at that moment in their hearing**. If that scripture is true, then Jesus is speaking that same scripture to us **live and direct right hear and now**.

Is the Scripture being realized in our hearing right now in our lives? Not tomorrow, not next year, or when we achieve a certain outcome in our lives that we will give ourselves permission to begin to find joy in our lives?

The joy spoken of in the first reading and the good news alluded to by the reading from Isaiah that Jesus reads and personifies is a message of good news, as true today as it was when Jesus first proclaimed it in the synagogue that day.

LOVE IS ABOUT LETTING GO OF FEAR:

By accepting everyone with no judgementscan we do that for one day?

Don't let a crappy day ruin you're your way. Catch yourself when you want to complain.

What if Michelangelo said, 'Sorry I don't do ceilings...or if Moses said, 'Sorry Lord, I don't cross rivers'...or David said I don't do giants....or Paul said 'I don't do Gentiles' ...or Mary Magdelene said, 'I don't do feet.'

Love is about not allowing our biases and judgements (which bombard us at every turn) to cloud or intercept the joy we are called to live by.

Jesus celebrated with his friends until the night before he died. He lived in the Spirit. May each of us be blessed with the grace to open our hearts so profoundly that that same Spirit fills us with the deepest of joys, a joy that the messiness of this world cannot disrupt or take away. Amen.