

Jesus in this morning's Gospel passage from Luke announces what he has been called to do in the world. He announces to the community that he grew up in that he is called by the Spirit of God to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to set the oppressed free. He is quoting Isaiah 61:1

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me;  
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners.

Jesus has claimed who he truly is; he knows who he is and why he is here. He has heard the words of Isaiah spoken to him, "I have called you by name, you are mine." (Is 43:1)

Jesus has been open to the Holy Spirit working through him. At his baptism *the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."* (Lk 3:22) Then *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness*, where he faces the temptations that the world presents to each of us. (Lk 4:1) Now this morning we hear, *Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee.* (Lk 4:14) Notice each time, Jesus is responding to the prodding of the Spirit within him. He listens to where the Spirit is guiding him and has the courage to follow the Spirit's guidance in his life. The Spirit of God is with each of us in the same manner. The Holy Spirit dwells within each of us prodding us to listen and claim who we truly are, to grow into the person God created each of us to be.

We just heard it in Paul's Letter to the Corinthians this morning,  
*For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.* (1Cor. 12:12)

At our baptism we received the Holy Spirit, and each of us has a purpose within the Body of Christ to build up the kingdom in our world. To use our God given gifts for the benefit of others. We are to use those gifts to proclaim God's love to the world and in the process to be the person God created us to be. Where is your passion, what are you drawn towards, where do you find energy and feel the most alive? It is in those moments and your deepest desires that you will find the Spirit leading you forward in your life. The Spirit prodding you to live into who God created you to be. Where is your joy? There is God.

Sometimes we get distracted and follow the paths that our culture or parents or friends think is the path for us. Sometimes it is in moments of struggle and suffering that we catch a glimpse of who we truly are.

This coming Tuesday is the Feast Day of the Conversion of St Paul. Paul was a devout Pharisee; he was a teacher of the Law of Moses. As a rabbi, he discussed the Hebrew Scriptures with other learned Jews. He persecuted the followers of Jesus for leading Jews astray from the Law of Moses. He considered the followers of Jesus to be heretics. He was passionate about his faith!

It was while he was on his way to Damascus to confront the followers of Jesus Christ that a light from heaven flashed upon him and he fell to the ground. (No horse) He heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Notice that he recognizes the voice since he says, "Who are you Lord?" and he hears, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, but rise . . . and you will be told what you are to do."

Saul discovers that he is to proclaim that Jesus is Lord and that the love of God is extended to all people, not just the Jews, after he is baptized in Jesus' Name, in the power of the Spirit. We know how he became Paul and preached the good news of Jesus Christ, forming Christian communities to proclaim the kingdom of God to the world. Paul didn't suddenly become someone totally different, he was the same rabbi that he had been before his conversion, he was still passionate in his faith, but his faith revealed the love of God to all people. He discovered that God was bigger than he had imagined. He discovered that God loved him beyond the keeping of the Law. He had heard God through Jesus Christ, call him by name and he was filled with the Holy Spirit to proclaim God's love to the world.

His acceptance of Jesus Christ and being empowered by the Holy Spirit didn't mean that he didn't suffer, but he knew who he was and what he was called to do in the world.

Our various cultures provide us with images, peer pressure and advertisements telling us who we are supposed to be. Jesus and the early disciples encountered similar cultural pressures. During the season of Epiphany we hear stories about how the Spirit of God is revealed through Jesus. We hear how Jesus in his humanity, discovered who he was and how he was to be in the world, in the midst of his culture.

Jesus announces in the synagogue that he is to *bring good news to the poor, 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.* (Lk 4:18) Jesus came to minister to people one on one. He taught large crowds, but he healed and addressed people **one on one**. He went to their homes for dinner, he healed, he comforted and challenged people in one on one relationships. It was through those personal relationships that people's lives were changed.

The resurrected Christ still comes to us today, as he came to Saul on the road to Damascus, urging us to listen to His Spirit working within us. When we take the time to listen to the Spirit we will hear Christ speaking to each of us, challenging us to grow into who God created us to be. That is why as Christians we are called to take time each day to pray and just be with God. Sometimes God will use a two by four as He did with Saul, but God will also be there gently prodding us to grow and use our gifts to proclaim God's love to the world around us.

I was reading a meditation by a woman rabbi this past week and as often happens when I am reading, one of the meditations could have been written for this week's Gospel. So I offer it this morning as a closing prayer for our journey through Epiphany.

*I yearn to be different from the center out, to recreate myself somehow, over and over again, from the raw materials of my soul. I ask only to be who I was created to be, each*

*time closer and wiser and better and nearer to the Source of all things. Creator of the universe, push me, pull me, strip me of what is no longer of service. And as You do, use me, as I unfold like a miracle before my very eyes. Amen*

***Dance of the Dolphin***, p.88 – Rabbi Karyn D. Kedar