

Homily for the 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 26-27, 2019

Readings: Nehemiah 8:2-4, 5-6, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21

Preacher: Marlene Bessette

It seems a little odd, but the topic that just wouldn't leave my mind after I read this week's gospel was "New Year's Resolutions." It's probably because I started thinking about what theme would be at the center of my reflection right after the New Year. I tried to talk myself out of it since it seemed totally unrelated to the Scripture and honestly a bit frivolous, but since it kept resurfacing every time I reflected on the gospel, let's just go with it.

Most research that I found states that 80 percent of New Year's resolutions are abandoned by February with only 8 percent successfully achieved. This is a pretty abysmal rate of success, but, not one that surprises me given my lived history of New Year's Day resolutions. So why do we have such an abysmal probability of success for actions or changes that are important enough to us to make a public resolution?

In going back to the research there are generally four reasons why we fail. One is because the goals are too vague, therefore exactly why they are important and how they will influence our lives isn't clear enough. The second is that our resolutions or goals become overwhelming and we don't know where to start. Third, change doesn't happen fast enough and discouragement sets in so the goal quickly begins to seem unattainable. And finally, we really weren't committed to the change so any and every excuse deters us.

So what does any of this have to do with our Gospel today when Jesus reads from the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah? Well, we're seeing Jesus call out 700 years of failed resolutions to help the poor, the captive and the oppressed. And guess what? We've tacked on another 2,000 more since then. Things are a bit better, but we still have a long way to go.

That's pretty clear when we look at our own city of Rochester. A city that itself has abysmal success rates in helping the poor. Currently, 52 percent of all children in the city of Rochester live in poverty; no glad tidings for them! Adults in poverty, many who may be innocent, are stuck in jail, unable to afford even minimal bail; no liberty for them either! The life span for residents with inner city

zip codes is 10 years less than their suburban counterparts; where's their freedom from oppression?

Why such a collective failure? Is it because the goals God has set out for us are too vague, or the task too overwhelming, or we're discouraged because little progress is being made or maybe it's just because we don't have enough motivation to do what it takes?

Perhaps the solution is in the "one sentence homily" Jesus proclaims in our Gospel today; "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." This homily asks us not just to "listen" because that's what we've been doing for the last 2,800 years, but to truly "hear." Because when one truly hears the word from God, we are called to action, to "bring glad tidings to the poor...proclaim liberty to the captives...and let the oppressed go free." Lofty resolutions indeed!

And maybe our second reading gives us a clue that the only way our "action" can deliver these resolutions is if we act in concert with the love of Jesus and act as if we were one body. We can't do it alone, or even as a community; we must tackle these goals, these resolutions to fulfill the Scripture in our hearing, collectively and in concert with one another as well.

Because the "you" in "your hearing" is the individual "you" *and* the collective "you." It is the authentic "you" who is being called to use your unique gifts as part of the one body of Christ, with Christ as our head. Without Jesus as our head, we are but a collection of parts: eyes, ears, hands, feet...that can all perform a function, and do some good, but we need Jesus to orchestrate and unify us and our actions to achieve those lofty resolutions. As proclaimed in our second reading from 1 Corinthians, "But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended." When we use our gifts as intended and behave as one body guided by the love of Jesus, then we will achieve the lofty resolutions God has entrusted to us.