

Third Sunday of Epiphany January 23, 2021
Eucharist Service 11:30 am
Anglican Church of Freiburg
Homily. Luke 4:16-18

Where do we find God?

Rabindra Nath Tagore once wrote, “God is where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathbreaker is breaking stones. God is with them in sun and in shower, and His garment is covered with dust. Put off your holy mantle and even like him come down on dusty soil”.

Each of us would have our own answers if this question is put to us.

Musing over Where is God when it hurts, Philip Yancey says – God is in Us, With Us- not in the things that hurt.

Through this week we were praying with a young mother from Nepal. Her husband affected with Covid had infection in his lungs and has been in hospital in the Intensive Care Unit in Ventilators and ECMO for 60 days now. Where is God? O God is carrying me in his hands and will do a miracle in our lives. She is confident. I am reminded of the Footsteps on the sand. In good times it was two pairs of foot-marks and in hard times only one. Where are you O God in troubled times I asked. I was carrying you my child in my arms and the footsteps were mine, was the answer.

During the Epiphany we were trying to look at the different ways Jesus Christ was being introduced to us- the ‘revelation’ of the Lord.

We continue our meditation on the Revelation of Christ. People have been waiting for long. The Messiah could come anytime. The Lukan text that is often referred to as the Nazareth Manifesto is about Jesus himself referring to the Old Testament prophesy and telling them that in him are these prophesies being fulfilled.

At the temple when the Scripture was given to him to be read Jesus read, through Isaiah 61: 1-3 and told the disciples on their hearing the scripture is being fulfilled.

Who was Jesus all about? What were the salient features Jesus said that defined the Jesus movement? We must carefully read that because that defines who we are now and what we are called to do.

1. Anointment of the Spirit of the Lord

The Christ event is seen primarily as an act of the Spirit of God. The Baptism of Jesus is over and Luke in the previous chapter had the picture of the Dove flying down and anointing Jesus or rather the Spirit coming down in the form of a dove or as the dove would descend. Luke 4 carries the story forward.

Anointing of the Spirit is the anointing with LOVE- Love that compels you to engage for the sake of the well-being of the other. Love that constraints you not to be complacent. Love that motivates you to action. Mother Teresa once said- I do what I do because in love I do not have an option not to.

Anointing of the Spirit is the anointing of Peace- where you long for Peace for all. You naturally become peace makers and when peace makers confront the harbingers of disruption the shadow of the cross comes to the picture.

Anointing of the Spirit is the anointing of Justice- Justice for all. Love cannot be silent when Justice is being denied. Love and Justice go hand in hand.

2. Good News to the Poor.

What is the gospel for the Poor? When the Millennium Development Goals set forth a Poverty free world, or a hunger free world here and now and not just in the hereafter there were quite a lot of questions asked- is there anything spiritual about it. What is the response of the church and the religious communities to these goals?

When we said- No Poverty, No Hunger, Good Health and Well Being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water we were saying these are everybody's entitlements and no one has the right to deny the other these basics or rather everyone has the responsibility of ensuring that no one is deprived of these because they are poor.

Good News therefore is surely bread, but not bread alone, it is also radical transformation of structures so that no one would have to go hungry to bed without having access to bread.

The greatest critique of colonial mission was that it used a soup, soap, salvation model but when you closely read the mission engagement, we see many of the mission movements engaged in radical structural transformation.

Bernard gave me a book to read. The story of Dr. Somerwell- who after securing a prestigious position to pursue Medicine in London went mountaineering. After conquering the Everest, he was informed of the outbreak of Cholera in South India and he went to offer a hand of help. Seeing the pain and suffering- he met God afresh and that changed his entire perspective of life- what was longed for till then became insignificant and he went on to be a mission doctor. This was in 1922 exactly 100 years ago.

Good News meant structural changes. Breaking the shackles of inherited injustice.

3. Recovery of Sight to the Blind

Blindness is something far beyond visual impairments that each person lives with in one form or other. There are people who rightly say I can see with the inner eye. Therefore, recovery of sight to the blind could be a reality far beyond the regaining of physical sight.

I would want to draw your attention to four kinds of blindness that we should be aware of.

Blindness to the Beyond. Comforting a family preparing for a totenvesper and burial this week I said- open your eyes and see the first day in heaven of our dear departed. See how the ones gone before rejoices receiving the one who is come. And they looking at us and smiling remind us that one day you would come too. So ensure you live life well and full.

Blindness to the Real Meaning and Purpose of Life. Life has a much deeper meaning and significance than earning and spending, eating and sleeping. God has a much deeper expectation from each of us. Born into the history of the world to affect the course of history in our own ways. Jesus came to open the eyes of his followers to that deeper realm.

Blindness to see your neighbour in pain. Like the story of the Good Samaritan we have people who often walk by the other side when they see their neighbour bleeding on the road side. Blind to the needs of others we live in cocoons of selfishness even forgetting the meaning of being neighbours

Blindness to see God at work in and around us. The question we started with Where is God? is still relevant in the lives of several seekers. Blinded to the continuing realities of the Epiphany- God revealing Godself we try to say that God is not here. The Epiphany moment cannot be far away.

4. Letting the Oppressed Go Free

Modern Day Slavery and Oppression has many manifestations. This had its own forms during the time of Jesus. The same voice that reverberated the courts of the Pharaoh was being heard loud and clear once more LET MY PEOPLE GO and the Christian gospel has always had as one of the focus the Liberation of the Captives, the justice to those in prisons for wrong reasons.

We are therefore called to understand afresh

Oppression of the Empire

Oppression of the Religious Structures

Oppression of the Social Constructs

Its manifestations can be found in the forms of Child Labour, Unpaid forced Labour, Sexual Labour., Human Trafficking, Labour in Mines, oil fields and deep-sea trawlers, under paid migrant workers, cheap labour... the list can go on.

We talk about fair practices in farming and fair prices and marketing we are reminding ourselves of the oppression that is in vogue and saying to ourselves we cannot be part of the same.

5. Proclaiming the year of the Lord.

The Year of the Lord- The Yobel- was a wonderful dream of justice and equality.

How do we rectify social inequality and allow a fresh beginning? The Tribes of Yahweh as Chad Mayers would say, had a brilliant idea. They simply said- Land would always belong to God. One could not sell his or her land but in dire straits could sell crops. The sabbath year would be a year of setting people who had to sell themselves into slavery free. But the great sabbath!! Seven Sabbath years and the next. The fiftieth year was the year of the Lord where the land had to be returned to its owner. Each one returned to his home, his or her inheritance. That is the year of the Lord. Where every inequality is addressed, and a fresh beginning of equity and justice is possible. But unfortunately, Jubilee is a Biblical Festival that was never celebrated in history. It is not just writing off the debts and letting people go free- it is redistribution of God's resources to ensure equality and justice.

In Christ when Paul says there is no Greek nor Jew, no slave nor free, no gender disparity- all are one in Christ- the new paradigm of relationships was the inauguration of the year of the Lord which will find its fruition in the kingdom fulfillment.

Comforting the Broken Hearted

Isaiah had at least two more characteristics which Luke in his radical re-reading significantly avoids which are tending the broken hearted and comforted the mourning. Christian Ministry is surely about attending to the broken hearted and comforting the mourning. But it goes beyond the maintenance of status quo. It calls for change. Change for the better.

As as we would sing later

Let us be reminded

He comes, the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of His grace
to bless the humble poor.

But the Nazareth Manifesto is the Revelation of Christ as what the Church should be engaged in when we claim to be followers of Christ. This Epiphany could be for you and me to understand afresh the meaning of our Christian Call.

Vinod Victor
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