

Jan 24 2010

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6,8-10

Ps 19

1 Cor 12:12-31a

Luke 4:14-21

May the words of my mouth and the secret meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

Thank you for welcoming me back and telling me you missed me. I won't say I missed you.. since the entire week was a serious 'how to do pastoral care' with the focus on your own parish! So St John's was never far from my thoughts.

Our collect today asks for grace to answer the call of Jesus and proclaim to all people the Good News.

The Psalm begins with the heavens declaring (proclaiming) the glory of God..

The beginning of the reading Jesus did in the synagogue ..”because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.. proclaim release to the captives.. and ends “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

In the Christian church there is a major focus on proclaiming.. and so it should be. We have Good News.. God loves each and every one of us.. Paul says.. “there is neither jew or Greek, male or female, slave or freeman,” and today we would add.. ‘tall or short, fat or thin, straight or homosexual, colored or white, rich or poor, judge or criminal’ CEO or homeless” (have I left any one out?) “we are all ONE in Jesus Christ”.

Good News.
God loves us,

just as we are..
because we are,
because God created us..
(and as a poster I have seen.. “God don’t
make no junk!”)

But sometimes, there is so much going on in
ones life.. the good news can not be heard.

This becomes a time when we need to pay
special attention to one phrase in the passage
from Isaiah that Jesus read.. “to let the
oppressed go free”.

That is part of OUR ministry as followers of
Jesus Christ.

So who are the oppressed?

Maybe those
Who have lost a loved one
Having family frustrations or challenges
Involved in divorce or separation

Who are lonely or discouraged
Who are unemployed or underemployed
Who are facing financial setbacks
In a job crisis
Who are Aging
Who are in hospital, rehab, or aged care
Who have a chronic illness, a terminal
illness, or are dying
Who have moved, been relocated
Who are in a spiritual crisis
Whose families are enlarging by birth,
Or adoption
Who are recovering from an accident.
Who.. maybe you can fill in other
situations...

Look at your family, your friends, your
neighbors, any one you come in contact
regularly... I’m sure you there are those who
have had unfortunate experience, or are going
through some trauma.

I am conscious of the passage in James..

“If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what good is that?”

For those who are experiencing social, emotional, or spiritual trauma, for us to say “Go in peace.. but offer no empathy, or even just sympathy.. no listening ear to understand the pain.. “What good is that?”

Some people who experience any of these kinds of things could use a caring Christian friend who listens, prays, supports and encourages... some one who will ‘be there’ meeting faithfully as long as there is a need.

These are the oppressed by circumstances who need to ‘be let free’.

Which brings me to a ministry here at St. John’s. Stephen Ministry.

The Stephen Ministry Leaders arranged for me to spend this past week in intensive training..

to understand the program,
to recognize the structure,
to prepare to train (that is equip) more lay people to “provide confidential, one-to-one Christian care to individuals in our congregation and community who are experiencing difficulties in their lives.”

I came home with the basics of the program.. all 35 pounds of it. I’m so glad I was driving and did not need to figure how to get that home on a plane!

In addition to that Leader’s Manual.. there are books, videos and many other resources

To help me ..To help others
help those oppressed in our congregation and community.

To free their mind so they can hear the Good News we have to offer.

In the letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians he describes the church as the body of Christ.. with its many parts.

God has called us together to represent the body of Christ in this place, and has given each of us gifts to complete the work we need to do.

“God arranged the members in the body, each of them as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body.”

So we have apostles, prophets, teachers, and gifts of healing.

So some of us proclaim, some give sight to the blind.. physical or spiritual, and some let the oppressed go free.

As the body of Christ, we may very well be aware of pain in another member.. who then is unable to function as God intends.

In our physical bodies, when one part hurts, be it a tooth, a thumb, a knee, a foot, a back, a head... a toe.. the entire body is aware of the pain.. and until the pain is cared for.. the mind has great trouble focusing on anything else.

The Stephen Ministers here at St John's are aware of pain in this congregation. I expect you are too, your own or someone else's.

Stephen Ministers are ready to care; to walk with individuals on their journey to wholeness as God provides the cure.

Do you think a Stephen Minister might help you? Ask me, or one of the ministers.

Do you think that God might be calling you into this ministry? Talk to me, or one of the ministers.

Stephen Ministry is an important part of the Pastoral Care at St. John's.

So please, keep us in your prayers always. We all want St John's to be as healthy and whole a body of Christ as possible.