

Spreading Christ's light

Mary McGlone | Jan. 25, 2014 Spiritual Reflections

At first glance, our reading from Isaiah seems to come about a month late. Weren't we just singing with Handel about the people in darkness being caught up in light? Hearing that prophecy during today's liturgy reminds us that the light, as John says, shone in the darkness that vainly tried to overcome it. Today we remember both the light and the cost and joys of sharing it. Isaiah addressed people forced from their homeland, people whose shared suffering created shared hopelessness, who were figuratively or literally blinded to the possibility of a better future.

Matthew's description of Jesus' first foray into public ministry makes important points in just a few verses. First of all, citing Isaiah, it reminds the readers that Jesus' work of salvation is as deeply rooted as God's involvement with humanity.



We have an unexpected key to understanding today's Scriptures in Paul's Letter to the Corinthians. Throughout the letter, Paul will express his exasperation with this community that he himself founded. Today, we hear about conflicts among them, based not on activities, but on their adherence to different ideologies. Proving that the tendency to argue over ideas rather than put Christianity into action is as old as the Gospel itself, the Corinthians were divided into competing camps that Paul characterized as being with Apollos, Peter or himself, with only some claiming that their primary allegiance was to Christ. In the midst of that heretical fracas, Paul even rejoiced that he had avoided establishing rituals by refraining from making baptism a key part of his evangelizing activity. Paul actually placed little emphasis on how the community used words or symbols to express their faith. His priority was on living: how the people treated one another and how their community gave witness to the world of a new way of living -- a way of life that clearly proclaimed the message of the cross.

When we come to the Gospel, Matthew recounts the call of the first disciples. Rather than act like a rabbi who would allow followers to choose him, Jesus used the practice of people who wanted to settle a dispute or promote their own cause: He went out and called others to join with him in making his case. While most who did that were only interested in settling some sort of argument, Jesus' call was far more demanding. His invitation to them to become "fishers of men" called for a total transformation. His followers would no longer

be merchants gaining something for themselves; they would offer their services for the life of any and all the others who might get caught up in Jesus' cause, the reign of God that was being fulfilled in the proclamation he put into action through his healing activity.

When we hear these readings during the first month of 2014, we are invited to remember our baptismal call and ask ourselves what tendencies promote or hinder our living it out. We begin by remembering that we are the recipients of ancient traditions that have brought us into contact with God's great love for humanity. This is not our doing, but God's.

We also remember that we have faith not for our honor and glory, or even our own salvation, but to spread it as a light -- a light offered especially to those who are experiencing darkness. Hearing Isaiah moves us to ask who are currently displaced, overburdened or blind with despair.

When we have identified our brothers and sisters most in need of the light of God's love, when we listen to their cry, we have begun to hear Jesus' call. That, of course, is not yet the beginning of real discipleship. Discipleship, the spreading Christ's light, only happens when we are willing to leave behind every political or ecclesial position that hinders or prevents us from acting on behalf of people in need. We may find ourselves with unexpected partners; we may even need to avoid discussion of certain contentious topics. But in so doing, we will learn the unimportance of our opinions in the light of the magnitude of the needs of our brothers and sisters.

We may not be able to leave behind our occupations, the nets and boats necessary to sustain daily life, but we can accept the grace of being freed from the encumbrance of our viewpoints, the ideologies and prejudices that prevent us from joining together with everyone else called to proclaim the kingdom of God in deed, and then, if necessary, in word.

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