

In today's gospel, Jesus goes beyond reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Jesus takes time, sits with the people, hears their questions. He models reading the Bible in and with community. This is uniquely church - a community whose common life is "under the word," Bonhoeffer says.

Today's Word, from Luke 4, invites us "under this Word," but as a warning that it may not always go down easy. It may push buttons, like for Jesus' first hearers. He pointed to stories of Elijah and Elisha who enacted God's regard for those who in their day were often disregarded. It invites us to think where we see this today – reach out to those in special need.

Last Sunday I shared how Barbara and Fred do this through their work – voluntary and paid: Barbara, caring for Seniors living with dementia; Fred with Union Station's Homeless Services. If you missed my PowerPoint Annual Report, we've made a few copies.

A report that came out on email this week stood out in this regard too. California's budget for 2022-23 will include Special Olympics Southern CA. Special Olympics helps youth do sports who in earlier years were left out because of differing mental or physical abilities. If you haven't watched a Special Olympic event – it's awesome. I bet Jesus would point these out today – like he named a widow and a man with leprosy.

But Luke 4 also tells us Jesus got into hot water for doing so. His hometown friends want special treatment from Jesus. He's one of them - a favored son. But Luke challenges the comfortable idea that my little group is all I need care about. For Jesus, those doing the will of God were his brothers, sisters, and mother. His identity is grounded in purpose, not position.

Other emails this week, from the ELCA and Lutheran World Federation, ask us to pray for Ukraine. As Paul writes in 1st Cor. 12 – "If one suffers, we all suffer." We're a part of LWF – a global communion responding to God's love being as wide as the sky.

There are risks, of course, in caring beyond time-honored boundaries. People might question why spend energy beyond ourselves when we don't have enough for ourselves. Resources are limited. Jesus got into trouble, pointing to God's care extending even to rival communities.

The response in Luke 4 is that Jesus gets run out of town and nearly pushed off a cliff. But at the very place where Jesus looks most at risk there's good news. Jesus isn't pushed off. He slips through and moves on. We glimpse here the resurrection.

The story doesn't tell how Jesus passes through the crowd, but he does. Imagine the people looking around. Where'd he go? How'd Jesus slip through? We don't know how, but that's how grace often works – we know not how.

The story of God's people throughout history who've lived expansive love, is that they don't have an easier time of it than Jesus had – think Martin Luther, excommunicated; MLK, Jr., others today who take risks for the disenfranchised.

Today, battles rage around the very reality of science. We hear mudslinging regularly about doctors advocating health measures. The ELCA has taken a stand in favor of science. We don't see medicine or vaccines as threats to religion or freedom, but as gifts from God.

You may recall an email I sent a few weeks ago inviting photos or stories of how you see God at work today. As I shared some last Sunday, this week I'm pleased to share the story sent by our own Dr. Barry Kendall. (I'm still receiving stories. Keep 'em coming.)

Barry wrote a beautiful testimony, and I quote:

“One way I see God at work in the world is through science. In the midst of a harrowing time of a truly terrible pandemic, scientific and technological advancements have created the possibility to invent new methods of diagnosing viral diseases, understanding them, visualizing them, sequencing them, treating, and tracking them globally at a rate of speed unimaginable a few years ago.

The internet has made worldwide collaboration amongst scientists rapid, creating an interconnected community at work to help all be healthier and safer. These advances and newfound tools build means of addressing diseases that have heretofore been untreatable.”

Barry goes on to write, “I see God's presence in the science of my own work as a clinical psychologist. There are now deeper understandings of the brain and body as integrated systems, new thinking, and approaches to help us heal and thrive, new knowledge not imagined 10, even 5 years ago, making huge positive differences.

“Even my car,” Barry adds, “now has technology scanning the road and traffic, looking to keep me safe. These systems alert me to danger, intervening to steer or brake faster than I’m humanly capable. This kind of technology is a flat-out miracle. And I’m grateful for it.”

Barry concludes, “These improvements through science and technology are to my mind amazing miracles. They flow from God's grace and unconditional love at work through scientists, engineers, technologists, innovators working across the planet. I strive to pause each day, even for a minute or two, to soak in God's presence through these miracles of science.”

Thank you, Barry for sharing ways you see God a-foot in our challenging times. As I said last Sunday, this is our time to be Church – to be an alternative community investing creatively, expansively in the love we see modeled by Jesus, attested to by scripture.

God’s love keeps extending with special concern for those in need. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection shows what’s entailed in such love. To “hail God’s new creation,” to be an “alternative community” of expansive love, is our calling as church. The Holy Spirit empowers us. Thank you for the ways you heed this call.

Amen

+Pastor Peg Schultz-Akerson, grateful for life together under the Word.
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