

January 31, 2010
Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
The Very Rev. William Lupfer

This morning, early, as I was walking through the hallway...to prepare for the 8:00 a.m. liturgy, I saw Cheryl Cathey, who was to be one of the readers for our early worship. Cheryl said, "Bill - maybe I'll be like Carl Gross." Now...if you worshipped here while Carl Gross was here, you had a great privilege. I never did. But I've heard the stories. Carl would open the words of Scripture and begin to read...and if they needed improvement...(laughter)...he would improve them. And, as he progressed, they appeared to need more and more improvement. So he would change them, as the spirit directed.

Now it's fascinating that Cheryl said that, and reminded me about Carl...because I was planning to begin this morning, with exposing our dear Lord Jesus doing the same thing. Now have you ever enjoyed part of a piece of Scripture, and really not liked the other part...so you only read half? That's what Jesus was doing in the Gospel, just before we started reading today. He's in Nazareth. He's home. Word is out, that he's an extraordinary person. The hometown folks can't quite believe it...who is this guy? We know him...c'mon. What's he doing in Capernaum? Can it really be true?...Is he really doing all that healing? Come here...let's hear. So Jesus comes into worship, and he opens the scroll of the Prophets. And he reveals himself as a student of Scripture. He reads Isaiah 61: Verse 1, and 2A. Now scholars will sometimes talk about verse 1 A and B. So Isaiah 61: 1 and 2A, are about Jubilee. This is Jesus announcing his public ministry, and he goes right to the most outrageous love that God gives the world...practicing Jubilee...peace...Sabbath...rest. Release to the captives...sight to the blind...healing to those who are infirm. And then he leaves out, "And vengeance shall be mine." Puts that to the side. He clearly makes an identity statement, of how he will be in public. And it's about Jubilee...practicing Jubilee, which even in his time, was an ancient practice...of embracing the fullness of God.

So ancient...that we see the practice of Jubilee in Creation. God worked six days, to speak Creation. And then, on the seventh day, God rested. At the very beginning, in our wisdom understanding of the fullest meaning of life...at the very beginning, we have a God who works...and a God who rests. And our God in Creation rests...not because God is exhausted...and needs a beer...and needs to relax...can't wait 'til Friday--Miller Time! No! In creation, rest is purposeful...meaningful...intentional...and it's claiming the value of work. On the seventh day, God rests...to fully embrace and behold the beauty of God's Creation. So, now...when Jesus announces his public ministry, he's saying "I will be here, fully, with you. And I will be part of God's big loving arms, wrapping around you." And I will push that, Jesus says, because part of Jubilee, is reaching out to those who may not deserve it. And thank God, right?, because that's where God's love comes to us.

So Jesus makes it clear right in the beginning...he pulls out. Right here, we see he pulls out the Scripture from Isaiah...leaves out the vengeance...and then he says, "Elijah, and Elisha"...both reached out to those who are outside. Jubilee includes eve-

ryone--not just people like us. So he brings in his announcement of his public ministry. He brings his intention...his big heart...to reach out past where the people in Nazareth were comfortable. Past their paradigm of purity. And he brings stories from their ancient Scripture, reminding them that God always, in Jubilee, reaches out past those in our group.

So the one leper that was healed, was a general of an opposing army! That's what Jesus was talking about with Elisha. And the widows, who were offered God's grace, were not the ones who were hungry, in the in-group, in the land of Israel. They were outlyers! God, in the fullness of God's creation, loves everybody. And that's the profound statement that Jesus makes this morning. And he tells us, in his announcement of public ministry, that that's what he will do.

So, we pause...here, today...on a Sunday when we have our Annual Meeting. Here is the annual report...right here. I invite you to read it. It's a description in words - and a few numbers - about what we value here. This is a good time to worship with these words of Jesus, who announces a new beginning...by inviting us to rest. Announces a new effort...by reminding us that Creation requires purposeful, meaningful, rest. So, as we're just about to move into our Annual Meeting...and look back on last year...and look ahead to some of the hopes and dreams of this coming year...the Scripture asks you: "How do you practice Jubilee? How do you engage purposeful, meaningful, rest? How creative is your life? And how do you bring that time that appears to be wasted...because it's that opening to God's grace. It's the seventh day of Creation. It's beholding what God has done. How do you do that in your life?"

Isn't it fascinating that when young children grow physically, they mostly do it at night? When they're resting...that's when they stretch out. I used to notice this, when I wrestled in high school. When you get all wound up, and you're trying to pin someone, or they're trying to pin you...sometimes the wrestler has to relax...just a little bit...to let those shoulders settle to the mat. So the referee can call the pin. In work, we are called also, to relax. It's again - like breathing - isn't it...if you're only purposefully breathing in because you need oxygen, it doesn't work. There's a rhythm of rest and work in life, that Jesus reminds us again today. And it's significant, that he talks about this in the beginning of his ministry, when he announces it.

So I ask you...how do you rest? How do you join this ancient practice of Jubilee? How does it inform your life? And...how does it strengthen your work? Your vocation...your life's purpose. As we look back on our common life together, here, this past year...you may remember that we received from the national church...a Certificate of Jubilee. Someone came from the national church...inspected us...walked around and checked us out. I think he was here two or three days...every time I turned around, he was around. He was looking at us, seeing how we're doing. Went back, wrote up his report, and from the national church came a Certificate to say, that we are a congregation that practices Jubilee significantly, at a certain amount of heft, and depth. If you walk into the Annual Meeting, and take a little detour around, you'll see the Certificate. The Jubilee Certificate. We hang it proudly. But let's be careful. That Certificate of Jubilee talks about what we've done in the past. Now...it becomes like a mirror...asking us

how will we participate into the future? How will we find our way...through purposeful, meaningful rest, as we seek to build a community that serves God, and brings the healing of God, into the world.

In this last year, the incredible difficult economic times that we've seen around us...our outreach ministries have fed fifty percent more people than the year before. And they did it, without begging for a lot of money. They got really smart. They relaxed a bit. I think they probably even prayed. They got creative. They built partnerships. We had a grass roots ministry, with Heidi Rose and some others...just sort of emerged to start feeding hot meals on Wednesdays. And then we did something radical: we invited the hungry people outside our doors...IN! And then even more--some of you sat down with them, and began to talk with them. We had enough people in the kitchen. What we needed were people to rest, with our hungry friends, who came in to rest as well. Let me tell you...those of you who did that, who came here on a Wednesday...simply to sit down and eat a meal, with the hungry folks who came in from our doors. Those of you who did that, were amazed! At how smart the hungry folks around us are...at how interesting their life histories are, and how dynamic they are. And...how genuine are the challenges that they face. Purposeful, meaningful rest...can bring your life, and your purpose, into clarity...in a way that nothing else can. We live in that rhythm...of work and rest...as we begin another year, I pray that we link our hearts with Jesus, as he began his ministry, proclaiming the year of the Lord..."Jubilee"...an outrageous attempt, to enact the words of love from Corinthians. To put our arms around this world, and be part of God's love.

A few years ago, we made a commitment to do that...to remind ourselves. We discovered some core values, that we think represent who we are, and what we hope to be. We put those core values in beautiful frames around our building. And we also put those core values, right up front here, in our Annual Meeting. I'd like to finish by reading them to you. Let these be a mirror to you...our core values...your core values...as you practice Jubilee.

Respect. We will respect the dignity of every human being.

Compassion. We will love our neighbor, as ourselves.

Integrity. We will proclaim by word and example, the good news of God in Christ.

Justice. We will strive for justice and peace, among all people.

Inclusion. We will seek and serve Christ in all persons.

Stewardship. We will sustain the gift of joy and wonder in all God's works.

We will do this, with God's help.