



# SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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## Sermon for Sunday, January 27, 2019

*The Third Sunday after the Epiphany*

FR. ALAN GIBSON

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10 | Psalm 19 | I Corinthians 12:12-31a | Luke 4:14-21

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Gospel from last week (John 2:1-11) we heard about Jesus's first miracle, changing water into wine at the wedding in Cana. It set the standard for the abundance he wants us to expect in our journey with God. Today, we hear part of Christ's first sermon, which he preached to a hometown audience in Nazareth. For his text, he chose a section from Isaiah, Chapter 61, which speaks of the expectation of the day when the Messiah will bring Good News, relief to those who suffer, and make God's presence with humanity a tangible reality. He starts his sermon by claiming that day has arrived though him.

As he began his work, Jesus spelled out his mission for all to hear. The goal is ambitious as it is straightforward. For the rest of his life on earth he never strayed from that mission of letting God's spirit loose on the world to heal damaged lives, bring peace, and connect us mortals to the divine. If the Church ever needed a Mission Statement to help keep it focused on what it is supposed to do, there would be no need to look any further than this first sermon.

Yet we all know the human tendency that, often with the best of intentions, takes something good, over organizes it, and in the process transforms it into something not quite as wonderful as it was to begin with. Jesus always kept it simple and remained focused on his goal.

Just as Jesus found in his time, the world in which the Church finds itself is complicated and conflicted. It's tempting to interpret our mission simply as a reaction to one or more of these conflicts or complexities. In the early centuries of its life, the Church struggled to cope with explosive growth, but by the end of the Middle Ages, found itself simply maintaining a stagnant, unwieldy institution. At times, the Church's witness has been the sole voice of truth in a culture seduced by violence, greed and evil. In other generations, it has openly colluded with the forces it once stood against.

In every generation of the Church's life, be it our own or some point in the past our call has been to "bring good news, to proclaim release and recovery, to let the oppressed go free, and to announce the year of the Lord's favor," to be the embodiment of God's love, just as Jesus was as he spoke

in his hometown synagogue. Nowhere does Jesus mention programs, committees, ritual, organizational structures or hierarchies; just people and our common need for God's love. Jesus' original mission is still our mission. Nothing has changed. The question is, as it has always been: is this what we want? Can we be satisfied with what God offers, or do our desires lead us elsewhere?

Because we are only human we probably need systems and order, or else even our best intentions will become chaos. But even with that, at the end of this day can we say we have tasted God's love in this place, with each other, with what we do, and with Christ among us? Because if we haven't our work will not amount to much.

At the end of the day 2,000 years ago, when Jesus had preached his sermon, when the people of Nazareth looked around, that day looked just like any other. The Spirit that filled Jesus did not fill them. They did not accept the local preacher, because he looked too much like one of their own. In their eyes Jesus wasn't sufficiently God-like. What they expected was something different from what Jesus had to offer, which was only himself.

Maybe all that wine at the wedding caused some confusion. Maybe they thought Jesus was just a nice guy who would help them forget their problems. He'd given them a good time at Cana, but that wasn't about forgetting. It was to show that instead of wiping out our problems and pains, Jesus wants to share them, and help us cope with them, so that he can also share our joys. That may have sounded too hard, too real, too much like work, for the people of Nazareth.

Faith is not a quick fix, nor something simply to make us feel good for an hour or two each week. Christ lays it out for us in that first sermon -- freedom, recovery, health and hope. In a world that is obsessed with isolation and selfish interests, God gives openly and abundantly to everyone, and then asks us to do exactly the same. Our job is to be a blessing to others, individually and as a church. That's how we live the Christian life. That is how the abundance Christ has brought in himself becomes a reality in our world. "Today the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." That can be our truth, but is that what we want? Or are we expecting something else?