

THE BODY OF CHRIST
Randall Tremba
January 24, 2010
3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." **Luke 4:14-21**

* * *

There are many ways to be poor, imprisoned, blind and enslaved. There are the obvious ways and then all the other ways.

There are the obvious ways. Just look at Haiti.

Even before the earthquake Haiti was a nation starving for good news, thirsting for liberation from corrupt governments, aching for release from economic exploitation. Even before the earthquake Haiti was a nation longing for vision, for eyes that could see beyond failure and fatalism to a favorable future.

For the past 20 years there have been more NGOs and non-profit humanitarian agencies per capita in Haiti than in any other country in our hemisphere. It's a nation where one physician, one nurse, one clinic, one school, one well makes a big difference. It's a nation that brings instant gratification to aid workers, at least until futility and frustration sets in. After all, there's not a whole lot of evidence to support optimism for Haiti. It's a land of "mountains beyond mountains."

It takes a whole lot of faith to keep going there. It takes a certain spirit to see what is possible. Haiti can't live on bread alone. It's going to take something else.

"The Spirit of the Lord has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

There are many ways to be poor, imprisoned, blind and enslaved. There are the obvious ways and then all the other ways.

A week ago I was here talking with a couple of our members. Their four-year old child sat waiting on the first pew. After talking with the parents I looked over at the child, spoke his name, and then stepped away to get on with important things I had to do that day. What a lucky kid, I might have thought as I walked away from the child. What a lucky kid, his pastor knows his name.

And then something happened.

Something prompted me to stop in my tracks, pivot and take a step back. I knelt down and looked the child in his eyes. His eyes widened at this sudden change in his world.

You're quite the young man, I said to him. I like how you waited so patiently for your parents.

I like being here, he said softly.

Really, I said. I do too. Maybe when you grow up you'd like to be a minister like me. Ministers get to do a lot of fun and important things.

It wasn't what I had planned to say. Actually, I hadn't planned anything. I just noticed the child in a way I hadn't before, stopped and knelt down. The rest took care of itself. And, who knows, the church might get a minister out of it someday.

There are many ways to be poor, imprisoned, blind and enslaved. There are the obvious ways and then all the other ways.

It's one thing to look at someone; it's something else to see them. It's one thing to hear someone speak; it's something else to listen. You don't have to go somewhere else to do great things. Your daily world is full of opportunities and invitations to open eyes and to relieve the oppressed in more ways than one. Your own eyes might be opened to see like you've never seen before.

After a few minutes, I left the boy and his parents and went to get my jacket. On my way out I saw the boy and his parents were now in the Fellowship Hall. I said goodbye and was heading for the door when the boy said to me: *I play basketball.*

That stopped me in my tracks. *I've played that game a lot, I said. I love it.*

So do I, he said.

Then we talked about dribbling, shooting, and playing defense. We went through a couple practice drills on the Fellowship Hall floor—keeping hands up, shuffling feet not crossing them and most importantly keeping your butt down. We ended with a high five.

Hardly a world-changing event. But my world and maybe his had gotten just a little bit brighter and better. It's one thing to see someone; it's something else to notice, to pay attention.

The next Sunday as I came into the sanctuary, gowned and ready to get the service started, that boy came up to me and let me know that his team had played the day before and that a couple other boys in this church are on his team.

Well, I said, let me know when you play next and I'll try to be there. And I will.

As you can see, I've got a new friend and a larger and richer world. I had been blind and poor and didn't even know it.

There are many ways to be poor, imprisoned, blind and enslaved. There are the obvious ways and then all the other ways.

We all have blind spots. But now and then we catch a break. A door opens ever so slightly. It's a moment of grace. It doesn't last long. But in that moment we are free to make a choice: to stick to our old way or step into a new way of being.

Something opened my eyes on a certain day in a certain place for a certain person. Maybe it came from all those years starting each day with a simple prayer: *help, help, help.* Help me notice others. Or, from the simple prayer at the end of each day: *thank you, thank you, thank you.*

We aren't changed overnight. We are changed as we practice the ways of love day in and day out. It's like a garden. It takes a whole lot of work before a single seed sprouts.

I may be a pastor but I still have a lot to learn in "the school of Love." Pastors get complacent and self-righteous just like everybody else. You may have a naturally effervescent personality but you still have much to learn in "the school of Love." You

may think of yourself as a tolerant and caring person but you still have much to learn in “the school of Love.”

The School of Love has no graduation ceremony. We don't aim for graduation or perfection; we aim for progress. Day by day, week by week, year by year.

I'm not sure who or what is in your world. But I'm hoping you'll notice more than you've noticed before in your world this week—seeing instead of just looking, listening instead of just hearing, kneeling down to admire a flower instead of strutting by.

I think God might be a little prejudiced. For once He asked me to join Him on a walk through this world, and we gazed into every heart on this earth, and I noticed God lingered a bit longer before any face that was weeping, and before any eyes that were laughing. And sometimes when we passed a soul in worship God too would kneel down. I have come to learn: God adores His creation. (St. Francis of Assisi)

Whether you know it or not, we are anointed by the Spirit to bring good news to the poor, to do small things with great love. The Body of Christ is still rising. You're part of it. And we can't get along too well without you doing what only you can do best. And that's the gospel truth.