

Jesus was in the synagogue for Sabbath worship. It appears he was the guest rabbi (preacher) for the day. He had been handed the scroll of the book of Isaiah the prophet and he had read the familiar words:

***“The spirit of the Lord is upon me and has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed and proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”***

Then, as today’s gospel reading begins, ***“Jesus began to say to all in the synagogue in Nazareth, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’”*** Thus begins his sermon or, as some think, his inaugural address!

Everything seemed OK. There was excitement and pride and, as Luke records, ***“all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.”*** Then suddenly his words began to get under their skin.

In the course of his homily he identified himself with the prophets Elijah and Elisha. “Curious,” they must have thought. “Fulfilled in our hearing? Elijah? Is he saying he’s messiah? Isn’t this ‘ol Joe’s boy for God’s sake?” The initial excitement of the congregation suddenly turned to anger and rage so intense they grabbed him and were about to kill him!

Jesus had struck a deep cord of resentment within the synagogue community. By citing the two familiar stories in Israel’s past he brought into the present moment the lingering, unresolved conflict that still existed deep within. Let’s take a brief look at the two stories.

There were many widows in Israel suffering under the more than three-year long drought in the land. Elijah the prophet brought relief to only one, a foreigner in Sidon (1 Kings 17). Some years later, with many lepers suffering in Israel, the prophet Elisha healed only one, a Syrian (2 Kings 5). Here were two non-Israelites receiving God’s favor!

These two stories were within their own Scriptures. The familiarity with them probably accounts for much of the intensity of their hostility, for anger and rage usually are the last defense of those made to face the unsettling truths embedded within their own tradition.

Isn't that so? Think of the anger, rage and violence that has come out from within the American Christian community as prophets began to lift up the issue of slavery and the need to end it. It has been an arduous and violent struggle into our day.

Likewise there has been anger and rage in the church concerning the ordination of women and the issue of divorce.

Today is the national day of remembering the ongoing struggle of full inclusion of gay, lesbian and transgender persons within the life of our church. Today is **Reconciling in Christ Sunday**, a day of giving thanks for the gifts, ministry and lives of non-heterosexual persons within our communities of faith, and lifting up the conviction that we believe in the God who reaches across all boundaries to welcome and heal all persons.

Luke, in this gospel passage for today, points out, perhaps too subtly some think that the conflict is not really between Jesus and Judaism so much as it is between that synagogue (that congregation) and its own Scripture. We of the ELCA are conflicted over this issue because of our Scriptures.

Luke's Jesus reveals a God who crosses the boundaries, that is, who reaches out across the rigidity of right belief (fearful orthodoxy) to free all who are bound or excluded in order to gather all into the community of God's redeeming love.

In and through our baptism the risen Christ takes us across the boundary of death into a new life and sets us on our course in life with him, changing our agendas to God's agenda for us.

That agenda begins with trust in God with all our heart and mind and strength. It takes us often out of our comfort zones to the boundaries and edges where we confront the dehumanizing results of religious bigotry, economic slavery, privilege, and every other form of evil that exists to divide and separate.

Holding on to the hand of Jesus going to the edges and the boundaries of life is risky, scary and exhilarating! FLC has been on this journey with Christ since 1920. Nearly a century! This community in Christ has had ups and downs, growth and decline, ethnic origin and emerging diversity, theological/Scriptural conflicts that have divided it. Yet by God's grace here we are!

We are on the threshold of a new era in this journey with Christ. Today's congregational meeting will reveal some of the contours of the road ahead of us. Risky, scary and exhilarating indeed!

***Deepening Faith. Expanding Vision.*** is our theme and motto for 2010. Holding firmly to the hand of our Lord is essential as the Spirit of the Lord leads and guides us into the days ahead.

Come to the Eucharist, reach out your hand and there find the nourishment for this continuing journey in Christ in the city.