

Address to the Annual Meeting of Saint Andrew's,

January 24,2010

If we want to know the mission of Jesus and our mission **today**, Luke places it here in our Gospel reading at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. We are called to bring the good news of God's kingdom to all people. How do we accomplish this task at St. Andrew's? Jesus' quote from Isaiah contains both good news and bad news for us, for we too are called to bring social and economic justice to the poor and oppressed **today**. This commitment to justice for all people and for all creation is a struggle we alone will not finish but which we are called to continue **today** with great urgency.

Luke uses the word "**today**" twelve times. The word only occurs 9 times in the other three gospels combined. For Luke, as Brian Stoffregen reminds us, **today** is a time of radical change. The shepherds are changed at Jesus' birth and return home that day rejoicing and praising God. Zacchaeus gives half of his possessions to the poor immediately after Jesus' visit. The thief who was crucified with Jesus is radically changed by his words and "**today**," as Luke says, he would be with Jesus in paradise.

The folks in Jesus' hometown are challenged by his words, as we are. At first they are proud of him and brag about knowing his parents. Quickly, however, they turn on him with rage as he continues to talk about God's grace being available to all people. Were they jealous of God's love for all, are we?

As Stoffregen says: "**Today** is a time of change brought about through an encounter with Jesus. The change may involve attitude -- rejoicing and praising God; or, wanting to kill Jesus. The change may involve financial priorities -- giving rather than getting. The change may involve finding comfort and hope in the midst of despair and death. For some of us it may require changes some agree with but will disappoint or anger others."

We often avoid change **today**. Some try to continue to live the past. "Remember the good, old days." We may choose to remember only the good times. We may choose to

talk about all the things we used to do. But what are we doing to make **today** just as glorious?

History is important. We constantly need to look back and learn from our mistakes and successes. But we can't live in the past. We live only **today**. It has been suggested that the greatest threats to congregations **today** are past successes that no longer work well in the present. We can also avoid change **today** by dreaming of the ideal tomorrow. Someday the prisons will be empty. Someday the oppressed will be free. Someday poverty will be no more. Someday all people will have heard the gospel. God will do all that someday -- so we don't have to do anything **today** to help the oppressed. Just as my saying someday I'll lose weight. Someday I'll start exercising. So I don't have to do anything **today** to help make that future come true.

Yesterday can look glorious. Tomorrow can look so glamorous. But **today** is so ordinary. **Today** is just another day. Wasn't Jesus just another home-town boy? Weren't his words just another teacher's words? The great, saving events of God comes in common, ordinary ways.

Today is a terrifying word because it calls us to action now. As "the Spirit of the Lord" was upon Jesus, so that same Spirit is upon each of you.

You will make some wrong decisions **today**, God promises to forgive those -- and who knows how the Spirit will use your mistakes! You will make some right decisions **today** and you know that the Spirit will use those too.

One of the challenges that faces this congregation is how to best use the resources God has given you. **Today**, I offer you two challenges. The first is to invite one other person or family to church **today**, and if not **today**, tomorrow and embrace a radical hospitality that you only can define.. The second is a challenge to do more as individuals and as a congregation in the world. You have a wonderful weekly ministry to the homeless, but if you are to do more, it will require "thinking out of the box," in new and exciting ways. In most need of our outreach **today** are our youth, young adults who are single and families.

We are called and empowered to work for the release of people who are bound **today**-- the rehabilitation of prisoners, the freeing of people wrapped in their shells of self-doubt and self-pity, including ourselves. We are called and empowered to work on behalf all of God's people. What will you do **today**?