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Luke 4: 18-21

Matthew 5:3-12

The Many Faces of Jesus: "Social-Political Leader"

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Christianity, the faith that claims to follow Jesus has for some of its followers been about a personal Savior. Yet, we must make sure, in the midst of that understanding and commitment, we do not make him a private Savior.

Christianity, the faith the claims to follow Jesus has for some of its followers been focused solely on the virtue of personal piety to the exclusion of all other virtues.

Christianity, the faith that claims to follow Jesus has for some of its followers had as its sole aim the salvation of the individual soul and thus ignored community and society.

Christianity for some these days, as it has been in years past, has become merely about personal repentance, personal redemption, and personal piety.

These things have been the agenda of some, yet I have for over 40 years wondered if this is Jesus' agenda. So, whenever I find myself pulled in several directions or unsure of the way to move forward, I go to the text where Jesus is standing up reading in the temple (from the book of Isaiah) where he is heard to say what we heard from the gospel of Luke this morning. After which he sat down, and said, "Today this is fulfilled in your hearing". So it was for Jesus, in his day. Can we claim its fulfillment in our day?

I don't know about you, but when voting time comes around, I try to find out what the person who wants my vote, has as her/his agenda for our country - for us/or not us as it might be, and then I decide whether she or he will get my vote. And thus when we say "yes" by giving them our vote, do we not also put ourselves under their leadership?

So, what then was and is Jesus agenda? In the past, I have looked at "the who" of his agenda (as it is recorded in Luke chapter 4) and then focused most of my life and a lot of my ministry on the who's. Yet, I thought it might be best for our church in this day and time, for me, and maybe even for our country and world, if we looked at the what's.

Jesus said/ and says his agenda is:

Announcing/Proclaiming

Recovering,

Releasing and Freeing.

Let's unpack the agenda one movement as a time, and movement it is, these are not passive words that do not require action. Rather, they are words, which have hints of being, but even more so, require doing.

In order to announce and proclaim, you have to open your mouth, you can't keep your mouth shut. Now, in the age of information overload, we can be made mute from the fear that we may not have all the information we need to act. Yet, let me propose here that you always have one thing you need to act - experience. You can speak up based on your own experience or the experience of another.

In the beginning of my lobbying career for a social service agency in Philadelphia, I initially chose to study, research, and

then check out more information before I spoke in front of City Council or in Harrisburg. Because, I remembered a long-time lobbyist (and I was just a newby) tell me: know the facts better than the other guy (and it usually was a guy). Yet, facts can be debated, misinterpreted, and even construed.

The largest work I did while I was there was on welfare reform. The seven-year lifetime limit for welfare was being debated at both the state and federal level. Facts abounded, and each side claimed to have the only credible information. So, I decided instead of reading all I could get me hands on, to invite people who were on welfare to talk to me, and then just listen, listen, and listen some more to people on welfare. That intense year of interviewing, listening, compiling, and summarizing what was shared, changed the course of how I lobbied for the rest of my eleven years there.

You have experience, others have experiences, which can be the basis of what we say, and can inform us how we are to say it. A little over a week ago, I sent a letter to the Havertown School Board in support of their new policy #259 about how transgender students are to be treated and what freedoms they should be given. I announced/proclaimed in my letter to the school board our own experience of one of young people who transitioned and in the process tried to commit suicide several times. I shared our experience and him, in the midst of others quoting the American Academy of Pediatrics. I told them this issue was and is nothing less than a matter of life and death for some of our young people. Announce/Proclaim - Let's not remain mute, let's speak up, because isn't that the agenda of the man for whom we voted.

Recovery is the second item on Jesus' agenda, and thus should be ours as well. When looking at the definition of recovery, one sees also the words return and regain. It means getting back to something that once was – a state of health, mind, or strength, or get back that which one possessed or controlled.

A part of Jesus work was getting back to what was – the way God had designed it at the beginning. People, places and things had gotten in the way, and now the life we had was far from the life God planned for us. Jesus agenda was to get us back to equality and harmony, and to do that he knew the powers that be, would need to be told, that they had gone far afield; for they had disturbed the right state of things according to God. There was now hierarchy who abused others, who not only took from them, but controlled them as well. People's state of health, mind, and strength has been taken from them, and Jesus plan was to bring back to humanity what was once for everyone, which now was in the hands of only a few. Our world needs to get into recovery. We have both the privilege and responsibility to help bring God ultimate wonderful plan for all back through our work to restore harmony and regain equality.

Announcing and Proclaiming, Recovering, and now Releasing and Freeing - the process of releasing involves allowing or enabling an escape from confinement. It means setting someone free. Releasing is about liberation, and liberty. It means you allow someone or something to move, act or flow freely, to set free from physical constraints, and to make available for others.

10 days ago, your Consistory wrote a letter to the board of the School District of Haverford in support of transgender students and the school district's efforts to have those students have access to facilities and programs based on their gender self-

identification, not merely on based on their gender assigned at birth.

What impressed me about our Consistory is the way they handled it. First, they referred to our ONA statement, which we developed after studying scripture and listening to the experiences of the LGBT community. We based our response on the listening we had done in the past, and then we listened to the wisdom and depth provided by our 15 year old junior deacon (Carlyne), which helped us understand even more what we needed to do.

In our writing to the school district in support of Policy 259, we not only announced and proclaimed (we did not keep our mouths shut), we sought to do recovery, and in that letter we asked that the school district continue releasing and freeing transgender students of the confines and containment public education (advertently or inadvertently) had placed on them in the past.

Announcing/Proclaiming, Recovering, Releasing and Freeing – this was Jesus agenda, it has been our agenda, and will continue to need to be, maybe even more now than ever! Yet, one thing differs between Jesus and us regarding this matter. He was able to say this was fulfilled on that very day, and then he closed the book on it. How we differ is that this has not been fulfilled by us, not to this day at least, so let's not close the book on this, the agenda given to us, for there are yet chapters to be written and authored by you, me, and us. May God give us the strength and wisdom that comes from listening, to continue working till the work that needs to be done is done. Amen and Amen.

