**Who, me? Anointed?**

**December 11, 2016 Advent III**

**Narrative Lectionary**

Isaiah 61: 1-11 Russell Mitchell-Walker

Have you ever been anointed? Felt called, such that there was nothing else you could do? When I was thinking about what I wanted to do with my life in grade 12, I was feeling a call to ministry, but it was to a ministry of Christian Education, leadership and education ministry. I did not feel called to preaching every week – and look at me now - God has a sense of humour. But at that time I did not know there was a ministry of education, social justice and pastoral care, Diaconal Ministry. So I went into accounting, which I enjoyed in high school and thought I would immerse myself in Christian Education as a volunteer. As I was flunking out of accounting, I heard about diaconal ministry and everything clicked. There was no turning back. I was called to ministry, there was nothing else I wanted or could do.

Anointed is the word in Hebrew (*mashach*) from which we get the term "messiah" (Heb: *meshiach*). It arises from an ancient ritual in which olive oil was poured over the head of a king to signify his consecration to the office. Priests were also set apart (sanctified, made holy) for special service by the ritual. Later writers applied the idea figuratively to someone serving an important function or appointed to a special task. This is the sense in our reading today. The text begins, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me…”. It is unclear who the ‘me’ is but it is assumed it is the prophet. Later on as Jesus begins his ministry he reads this passage as the reading of the day and declares it coming true with his reading, implying that he is the one anointed with the Spirit. In his ministry, he proclaims the kingdom has come and calls us to live the kingdom. So in essence he is also calling us to be the anointed ones as well. Are we ready for that? What would this mean?

The passage goes on to proclaim bringing good news to the oppressed, binding up the broken-hearted, and release of the prisoners, proclaiming the year of God’s favour. Many believe the year of God’s favour indicates the year of Jubilee, a time when every 50 years all debts are forgiven and everyone gets a fresh start. Wouldn’t that be nice! Can you imagine if that happened today, how liberating that would be for so many especially those who are debt poor? One might wonder how it would be for those who are owed the money, but it most cases, they could probably afford it. More so it is about bringing things into balance, making things more equitable for all.

These past few weeks and months, I have been hearing about Trump’s concern about the impact of Free Trade on people in the US, promising to bring the jobs back to the US, that went to Mexico. I remember after the NAFTA had been in effect for a while hearing about the Maquiladoras that appeared in Mexico and other Latin American countries. Mostly women, including teenagers were working very long hours for low pay and very little breaks to make clothing and other products for American companies. The factories are in ‘free trade zones’ where the companies do not have to pay any trade tariffs. There are 600 in Tijuana alone. They are called sweatshops, and I remember in the 90’s much education and campaigning in the church for fair trade clothing. We even had fair trade fashion shows. This week, CBC ran a [news story](http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/mexicans-fear-they-ll-pay-for-trump-s-wall-one-way-or-another-1.3882226) about the maquila in Neuvo Esperanza (which ironically translates New Hope) where the concern is that with Trump threatening to get rid of the North American Free Trade Agreement, they will lose their jobs or factories that were planning to open will not open. So on the one hand, Trump sees the challenge and problem that NAFTA has been to the American economy and local workers, which is a good thing. However, what was created for those outside of the US, was jobs, but not well paying and in poor working conditions. Unfortunately even though the jobs are hard and conditions bad, it is a job and it is better than not having a job.

If we were to work toward living out God’s favour, then we would work toward a system where all have jobs that are paid fairly. If there is to be change, it needs to be change that is fair and just for all. It may mean adjusting to what we are used to, but the benefit to all is an important value that God is calling us to. It is also creating the joy that is the message of this third week of Advent, a joy that comes from seeking justice. A joy that God is with us in all that we go through and struggle with. A joy of being in community that is committed to justice and fairness.

The passage then talks about the mourning of the community of Israel and they are mourning over the time it is taking for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple that has been destroyed. We might ask what are the destructions that we have experienced in our time that are taking time to rebuild? Do we hear about them? How is the rebuilding in Indonesia and India going after the huge Tsunami of 2004; or in Japan, following the more recent Tsunami and the nuclear powerplant meltdown; in Haiti following the earthquake; in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina; closer to home south of us following the floods of recent years; and what might be our role in rebuilding places like Aleppo and Mosul as coalitions fight to get rid of ISIL and tyrannical leaders. Transforming the "former devastations" will require a commitment to care for the people, and a love of justice and a hatred of wrongdoing as named in verse 8. Elna K. Solvang of the [Working Preacher](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1100) site tells us: “ A new future is possible because God promises to be in everlasting covenant with us (verse 8) and because God has provided the appropriate work clothes: garments of salvation and robes of righteousness (verses 9-10). The city where hopelessness had taken root will, by God's spirit and by God's blessing, sprout righteousness and praise.”

As we engage in this season of Advent, we see the more and more the one who we are waiting for. The one to come is in every sense the word returning to us. He comes with justice, as God always sends one who announces justice. And this announcement brings joy to those who hear it. The Angels proclaim Good news to the poor? What did this mean? What was the good news? Could it have something to do with the fact that the angels proclaimed this to the poorest and outcast shepherds? The good news is the proclamation of a new order, a new world, a new presence that proclaims justice for all, a fairness and blessing that we can experience in the love of God, the love of one another, that God is with us. This is the joy of the message, the joy of this season. God calls us and comes to us and is in us.

In this light I wish to close with this poem that I found on the Narrative Lectionary facebook page by Moira Burgess.

*Said the Lord*

**Poem by Moira Burgess**

And the Lord said:

I shall send my child to earth

to be a teacher and a comforter

and my child shall have wisdom

and shall love and nurture and save the children of men.

So shall it be, said the Lord.

And down came the Holy Spirit

and a virgin bore a daughter

who was the daughter of God.

A girl? people said.

Better luck next time.

And the child grew and ran about in Galilee

and told her cousins stories about God. For a while.

Bring in the goats!

Mix the porridge! Sew on that sandal strap!

What's the matter with you? people said.

And the day of her womanhood came upon her

and she rejoiced. Life ahead,

and her family rejoiced –

soon she'd be off their hands.

But I want to put people right about God, she said.

Nobody likes a lippy girl, they replied.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, she said.

You're odd enough already, her family said,

don't you want a husband or what?

as they beat her

and married her off rather quickly

to a nice young fellow with his own flock of goats

so that was all right.

And she lay with her husband, of course.

And she bore him a son so everybody was pleased

and a daughter, well, can't be helped

and two more sons and another daughter,

and another son

(not counting those who died)

the spirit of the Lord on a back burner

for fifteen years and more.

Wouldn't have been without them. Heavens, no.

And when the children were grown

she said to her husband:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me.

Who's going to make my supper?

her husband enquired.

He didn't beat her. Didn't need to

begot another son instead, who died.

So she went to milk the goats

and make the porridge

and the Lord came to her in the tent.

Why don't you begin your mission, my daughter,

said the Lord, rise and go about Galilee

with twelve disciples

as my spirit may command?

I have tried, you know,

said the daughter of God.

And the Lord looked at her, at her stretch-marks,

her dishpan hands, the snaggly teeth

the place where the goat bit her

and he knew that it was so.

They are a stiff-necked people,

the children of men, said the Lord.

That's one way of putting it,

said the daughter of God.

And the Lord sighed.

You are an idea, my daughter, said the Lord,

whose time has not yet come.

A thousand years from now

still no chance.

Two thousand years? Not really.

How are you on flower-arranging? said the Lord.

It's never been my forte,

said the daughter of God.

And being weary she closed her eyes

and was gathered to Abraham's bosom,

or Sarah's bosom, perhaps, let's hope,

a bit more empathy there.

I think I'll try again next year,

said the Lord,

but this time I'll make it a boy.

And it was even so.

Are you called to be an anointed one? What challenges are there for you to live out your call? How have you been able to live out God’s call for you? May we find the joy in the Spirit of the Lord being upon us, and calling us to love and justice. Amen.