

Luke 4:14-21

Epiphany 3

January 21, 2007

I thought I would start with the “Got milk?” ads. Two words say it all for the dairy farmers. I wonder what two words would say it all for Jesus.

Got faithfulness? That’s a possibility. We could start with that question each week as we gather in worship. Got faithfulness? Then each of us could examine our lives to see if we are being faithful to God.

Got goodness? That’s another. It seems obvious that a church would be filled with people who are good people. Really good people. Got goodness?

Or how about “Got love?” God is love the scriptures say. When people walk into a church and experience love they want to be a part of that church – in the first days of Christianity people commented on how the Christians loved one another. Got Love?

When I look at the gospel reading for this morning another word comes to mind – the word poverty. For when Jesus picked a passage of scripture to describe himself he read these words, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.”

Got poverty? Jesus proclaims good news to you.

Now this sermon would be a lot easier to preach if Jesus had said that he was sent to proclaim good news to the faithful ones. Deep in our hearts we know that is the truth. God wants people who will do God’s will day after day – every Sunday in church – every day sharing and caring and living upright – moral lives. If this sermon were a pep talk for faithfulness you would know exactly what God seeks from you. But Jesus was anointed to proclaim good news to the poor.

Some would say that the good news Jesus proclaimed is that God is wiping out all poverty in Jesus. The poverty of our sin, washed away; the poverty of our dying, overwhelmed by the life that Jesus gives; the poverty of our estrangement from God, overcome.

Others would say that Jesus is proclaiming the end of material poverty. The good news for the poor is that Jesus disciples will share with the poor so the poor are poor no more. Jesus is proclaiming a time when everyone will have enough to eat and safe water to drink and shelter and clothing. Poverty is no fun – having a child starve does not draw a person closer to God. God surely wants poverty to end. So why, “Got poverty?”

After he had read the passage that declared, The Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor” Jesus sat down and announced, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus did not have to go out to find some poor people to fulfill this scripture – people with poverty were surrounding him. The same is true here today. You and I are the poor that Jesus is proclaiming good news to today. Not our faithfulness, nor our goodness, nor our love will bring good news to us but our poverty will open us to hear what Jesus proclaims. For when we set our hearts on our faithfulness, our goodness, or our loving we are like a glass that is already filled – no more can be received. But when we know our hunger – our poverty – our emptiness then everywhere there is room for Jesus. Always we are poor, always his word fills us with his riches.

Got poverty?

Sometimes it is a poverty of health that opens our hearts to Jesus. Poor health. Days of months or years may go by when life is good and we do not even think to pray but serious illness will bring us down on our knees.

Got poverty?

Sometimes it is a life that is totally lacking in goodness opens a heart to Jesus. No self respect, no illusions but a need for the love Jesus gives.

Got poverty?

Sometimes it may be loneliness or fear or anxiety – that convinces us that we can no longer go it alone.

Got poverty?

I have a friend who would not like this sermon. He would say that it is far too negative. God does not create junk. God has made us to be rich and proud and strong. He would say we should focus on what is right and noble and good in life.

My answer would be that you should not seek to put yourself down but if there is any poverty in you do not run from it. Let Jesus fill your emptiness – your poverty.

Got poverty?