

RIC Sunday Epiphany 3 – RIC Sunday

Wow, here we are on another precipice. When I started back on June 26, 2013, we were on a precipice ready to jump off and start our work together. When we jump off we never know where will land. Thankfully as followers of Jesus Christ we know that we are not alone. We believe the Holy Spirit is leading and guiding us.

We have been through some major changes, and they all happened within 5-6 months in 2024. Walter passed away February 16. Thankfully we had a vice president in the wings to take over. In March we began counting money at the church. Our former secretary shared with members that I would not be putting my name in to be considered for your pastor. In one week in June, we essentially had 2 staff changes. That is a lot for any system to handle.

We gathered our gifts and moved forward. We had a great VBS. Thankfully we found a new secretary within a relatively short amount of time. Thus, Randy and I could give up doing the bulletin and E-news. Thanks to Mark Kadrofske for planning and coordinating youth events. Sunday School is running smoothly with our gifted education people.

We needed to do some reorganization with the pantry, and it now has a steering committee where the oversight is done by a group of people. They even have a job description for their committee. The finances are being monitored, and more funding is being sought. The pantry is in good shape right now.

This is not about me doing all of this work. My role was to plant seeds and support the gifted people here at Faith. The council is in the midst of restructuring the operating system of the church so that the healthiest ministry can be done. This came out of the leadership workshop that we had and the work of the transition team.

Today Pastor John will be sharing some thoughts on the Parish House as well as Laurie at our annual meeting. With the new administration we are very concerned about the guys and their continued ability to stay here. Now in saying that, we know of no imminent issue, but it is a concern. Things are changing every day. Michigan Refugee Hope has begun working on a safety plan and Faith will need to be a part of this. Pastor John, Laurie and I attended a zoom meeting on Tuesday with the other refugee providers in Lansing. This is to ensure that the leaders here are as up to date on what might be coming down the pike.

This is what soon to be Pastor Megan is walking into. She will need your support in navigating whatever is ahead. Remembering what we have been through

since I have been here. I believe that we have moved through it together with the power of the Holy Spirit.

This leads us into our gospel lesson for today. After Jesus' time in the wilderness with the devil, he returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. Jesus gave his inaugural address to the people in attendance at the synagogue.

News had spread about Jesus throughout the whole countryside. He had taught in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. He returned to Nazareth, where he had grown up. He attended the service as he normally did. The hometown boy had come home.

The assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where he wanted to read. As he read the passage from Isaiah, Jesus identified who he was and what his mission was. He said that God had anointed him, and the Spirit was on him. He was sent to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

As the Gospel of Luke continues we find Jesus not being liked very much. He was shaking the status quo. Neither the church leaders nor the government leaders were happy with his message through word and action. Next week the lesson would have been how even his hometown people realized they were being asked to do something that they might not be comfortable with.

When I think about the fact that Jesus has asked us his followers to carry on this work, I'm just a bit taken back as were the people in his hometown. This is a great deal to do, and it has become more and more of an uphill battle.

This week at the National Cathedral there was an Episcopal bishop who preached this kind of message, and she has been criticized by many people in power, even pastors. There is now a congressman who has introduced a resolution to condemn her as her message was distorted. He is saying that the sermon was not reflective of the faith community at large. As of today, I do not speak on behalf of Faith. I challenge you to consider what this means and where you stand. Is the bishop's message in line with the welcoming statement?

We can easily get bogged down in what we can't do instead of focusing on what we can do. This was something the bishop felt she was called to do. I understand she also offered the National Cathedral as a resting place for Matthew Sheppard.

I cannot cover all of these points Jesus outlined for himself in one sermon. What I would like us to briefly look at is preaching good news to the poor. You may tell me that you are not preachers and that is my job along with a few others.

The Greek word for preach in this passage is *euangelizō* which means announcing, declaring, or telling the good news. This is for all of us including foreigners. It is what we say and do. It is the message that we present to others through our words and actions.

Thus, this is what Jesus is calling all of to do in order to continue his ministry. In this passage from what we believe to be 2nd Isaiah, which is after the exile, they are reflecting on the destruction of Jerusalem and having to rebuild it. Even though the restoration has been promised it is frustrating project. A great deal of conflicted feelings are probably being felt.

Could it be that Jesus was reminding the people in the synagogue what had gotten the Hebrew people that Isaiah was prophesying what had gotten them into exile? The people had been looking for a leader to bring them more power and control through acquiring more land. It was a very self-centered way of thinking and greediness. This way of thinking excluded people who were different from them.

I have said it before and I am saying it again, history repeats itself if we don't learn from it. God has been bringing the message to God's people that God includes everyone. This is what RIC Sunday is about. It is a reminder that this is the good news that all of us have been called to announce. The good news is for all people.

In my first sermon here, I thanked you for welcoming me. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. Faith has welcomed our refugee brothers in the Parish House. We welcome people to come and take food that they need \in order to live. This is sharing or announcing the good news.

In going forward, Jesus calls you and I to continue sharing the good news. You may hear voices and see things done that do not model good news. Please allow the Holy Spirit to continue guiding you. This beloved community is called to share this good news regardless of these voices. Do your best in this place and this community to not let history repeat itself.

Remember the Holy spirit has led us to this day and will lead you and myself forward to continue sharing the good news where we are!

Let us pray: Gracious Spirit, thank you for bringing us together to share your good news. We continue to rely on you to lead us forward and to discern how and where to share your good news, regardless. In Jesus, Name. Amen