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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
3rd Sunday of Epiphany/Annual Meeting Address/ Year C
Luke 4:14-21
January 27, 2019

In the Name of the One, True, and Living God. Amen.

Today's Gospel reading took me way, way back to my college days. I graduated from Webster University which, back in the day, was known as Webster College. Webster was and still is known for its many programs and especially for its excellent Visual and Performing Arts programs. Both great reasons for my attending there. Early on I geared my studies toward being an art major because as far back as I can remember I always loved to draw, paint, and study the masters. At Webster I loved studying art history and taking the required art classes. But early on it was apparent that theater would steal my heart. Not everyone survives the rigors of Webster's theater department. Our freshman class boasted 91 eager learners and future performers and behind-the-scenes folks. By graduation less than 30 of us survived. I guess I was one of the lucky ones.

Along with taking acting, movement, vocal, and directing classes, there was an expectation that one take dance classes. I had never taken a dance class in my life prior to this and usually to be in one's late teens, early twenties, is considered to be too old to start. Oh to be young again! But acting majors are always taught that if you want to seriously be considered "in the business" it is always best to be a triple threat or close to it anyway. Know how to act, sing, and dance!

That second semester of freshman I took my first dance lesson: 'Introduction to Dunham Technique', a marvelous blend of Haitian, African, and jazz dance. The two instructors who taught those classes were also students at Webster and also lead members and dancers at the Performing Arts Training Center or PATC (as we called it), a part of the curriculum of SIU-East St. Louis. It was there that students (and back then, the public, could take dance and exercise classes for free because Katherine Dunham herself had taken up residency in the troubled city of East St. Louis with the hope of getting young people especially gang members interested in the arts and off the streets. So with a couple of my other classmates we would make the trek (when there were no other classes and shows we were a part of at Webster) to East St. Louis.

Now, truth be told-I was raw. Oh, I had a little bit of rhythm but hardly anything else. To say anything else would be a lie. I learned how to jete` and plie, to isolate muscles, to push through movements and gyrations across the floor in a wide second position with arms out like so- and to move to the rhythmic beat of the drums. Whew! It was rough but I stuck with it and after a while I moved from beginner's classes to intermediate classes though there were a couple of times that a few of us were threatened to be sent back to beginner's classes.

The spring semester became the summer semester and then progressed to the fall semester and the cycle continued for more than a couple of years. During all this time the great dancer and choreographer, Katherine Dunham herself, would sometime grace our classes and rehearsals. Oh yes, I would very often stay for rehearsals after classes were over, trying to learn movements just because you never knew if and when you might be called to fill in though all this time I never noticed any of the instructors really noticing me. However some of the company members (the more seasoned dancers) would sometimes give us newbies the stink eye. You know the kind of look that said, 'Who are you and don't think you have a chance...'

Well, one evening Miss Dunham made an appearance and stayed throughout rehearsal. When it was over everyone was dismissed and like everyone else I left the dance studio to change out of my dance clothes when the door to the ladies' room suddenly flew open and in a frantic voice my dance instructor from Webster and Miss Dunham's lead dancer said to *moi*, "Where are you going? Miss Dunham wants you!" Me: "Excuse me. What?" Her: "Miss Dunham wants you!" Me: I'm thinking, she's joking! "MISS DUNHAM? Me???? Not this nationally and internationally known Phenom in the modern world of dance. Not this dance pioneer known as the "matriarch and queen mother of black dance." Not this world renowned choreographer of stage and film. The one who choreographed the dance sequence in "Stormy Weather?" (THE Katherine Dunham, who by the way, would be given not one but five honorary doctorates and was a 1983 Kennedy Center Honoree.) Her: "Yes, she wants YOU! Hurry up!"

Some stayed and watched that night as Miss Dunham took myself and another new male dancer, and choreographed just the two of us in her newest work, "Bid 'Em In"- a ballad that called to mind the sorrow and pain of human beings being sold off into slavery. "Bid 'Em In" became part of *our* company's repertoire. It was a dance that Theo and I danced in many a tour performance and an experience this newbie would never forget for the rest of her life. Of course, the

stink eye continued and me being me could only do my thing and say to myself: “Yeah. THE Katherine Dunham. She chose ME!”

This morning we return to Luke’s Gospel. Jesus has come home to Nazareth and to people who knew him and loved him and he returns to his home worshipping community, to the place he must have worshipped many times as a young boy. He is handed the scroll and from the scroll he chooses and reads the passage from Isaiah which speaks of the One who is to bring good news to the poor, release to those who are captive, recover sight to the blind, set those who are oppressed free, and proclaim “the year of the Lord’s favor.”

“Today” Jesus said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

And then he sat down.

Everyone waited for what he might say next for everyone knew that the words of Isaiah had power. Luke says that they watched and their eyes “were fixed on him.” They waited, expecting Jesus to make Isaiah’s words come alive. But what exactly were they expecting?

Jesus up to this point in the Gospel, has not done a lot. He’s been baptized. He had been driven by the Spirit into the wilderness. And the Spirit has now led him back home. He had only been teaching and preaching for a while-still a little raw. Still a little green- though it seems his reputation has begun to catch fire. So what would the now grown man Jesus say to *them*? What on earth would a carpenter’s son say to those who had known him all his life?

They waited and yet, Jesus has preached his sermon. “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” In one sentence he has said it all. He has told them that in him, the Kingdom of God has arrived. Centuries of waiting have ended. He is the One that Isaiah was writing about. He is the anointed, and appointed and chosen One. Confirmed at his baptism when the heavens opened and the Spirit descended as a voice from heaven was heard to say, “You are my Son the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Yes, it was Jesus who was chosen to save his people-not Moses, not Samuel, David, not Deborah nor any other judge or prophet-not even his cousin, John. It was Jesus. And on *this day* his mission has been laid out: bring good news to the poor, release the captive, bring sight to the blind, set people free and announce God’s favor to everyone.

As readers of the Gospels, we know that Jesus stayed true to his mission. It didn't matter to him whether others questioned where he came from, what his background was or how he came to teach and preach with such authority. He didn't care who gave him the stink eye! He was the Chosen One, Spirit-led and Spirit-driven, to go about his work in the world to the glory of God.

In a very real way, just as the Spirit was upon Jesus, the Spirit is upon each and every one of us, members of His Body, the Episcopal community of faith right here in the heart of Florissant. We are called as individuals and as the parish of St. Barnabas to be just like him.

It is our Annual Meeting and I suspect that today there are Annual Meetings going on today too. And like other parishes we celebrate and remember all that was last year, a year of challenges and blessings. Busted pipes and major water damage and with that came postponing or cancelling activities until repairs could finally be made in Tudor Hall. We continued to plan and work under the continued shadow of deficits. Said goodbye to dear friends. And we made the very hard decision to go from two Sunday services of Holy Eucharist to one.

But there were many upsides in 2018 and much to be grateful for. A new kitchen for our fabulous feasts and the continued culinary skills of our faithful cooks. A gracious outpouring of food and other items for those rely on T.E.A.M. A choir director now Minister of Music who through blood, sweat, and tears, showed a willingness to learn a new skill and is coming along as a quite able organist. Sunday ministers and commissions and committees and ECW and a fabulous choir all doing their thing and doing them well. A brand new core of tutors for children in our school district. A set of volunteers who created a functioning library for the teens at Episcopal City Mission. The welcoming of two adult members into the family of God through baptism. The willingness of a member to step into the role of secretary and office angels. The sharing of prayer and meals with our neighbor churches. The invitations and gatherings (including Bible Study) with members of our sister church, St. Stephen's. The hard work of our Vestry. A very successful 'Season of Giving' and unexpected monetary gifts. The countless acts of sharing and caring within and outside these walls. The countless acts toward reconciling and accepting and of trying new things. The countless ways of sharing gifts, talents, and treasures. Pastoral visits and prayers. The love and support of all of you. And so, so, so much more! There was and is a lot for us to thank God for.

Together *we* have tried *our* best to live out the essence of today's gospel and of Paul's directive to the Church in Corinth and our own mission statement. To do *our* best as *we* discerned God's call in *our* collective lives as a community of faith.

But there is a hard truth that we are facing this year and I couch it with what I have said at every Annual Meeting since 2011. 1.) There has yet to be made that "magic bullet" that will fix any and everything. 2.) Our call is not to live in the past and bask in the glory of the good old days. 3.) Our task is not to simply maintain or to merely survive until the money runs dry. Some things will and must change even die so that new life can begin. One theologian has said "Living in God's promise is not about yesterday... It is about NOW..."*- TODAY.

There will be transitions and changes in this coming year. There will be choices that will need to be made by the Vestry and with your input. What, when and how will all be revealed at the appropriate times. That being said, all of us must stay encouraged and believe and recognize that God is always creating new things in the world, through and within all our lives, including this place.

With all my heart I believe that St. Barnabas is meant to be the beacon on this hill that shines its light within its membership and out into the world. I believe that St. Barnabas is to make disciples, showing others the way to Jesus. I believe that this church can with God's help, continue to live out those core values that are so dear to us-extending God's love and hospitality, feeding and serving others, and being the sacred space where all are welcome. But it is not enough for me to believe it-you've got to believe it too. Do you believe it? Do you? I ask, I pray, that all of us, all of us, be faithful and live the way of Jesus. Pray. And be open to the power of the Spirit.

The words of the Prophet Isaiah spoken through Jesus that gave him direction and vision, are written for *us*:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me (and therefore also with you),

because he has anointed **us**

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent **us** to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

Yes, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Upon you. Upon us.

“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

And so it begins. Amen.

*quotes taken from "The Power of Today", a sermon by Dr. Diana Butler Bass, for the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany-Year C, January 24, 2016.