

Date: January 26, 2025 (Epiphany 3)

1. Texts: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Ps. 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21.
2. Subject: Christology.
3. Topic: our ministry arises out of Christ's identity.
4. Aim: encourage, guide.
5. Proposition: "We are the inheritors of Jesus' ministry. We are Jesus' legacy."

## ON BEING JESUS' LEGACY

We're now in the season of Epiphany, which will end on Ash Wednesday. This means that the lectionary has been focussing our attention on the identity of Jesus as the Christ.

We always have to start such reflections with the truth that the Christ existed before the creation of the universes. You see, the Christ is God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Creator. The Christ is the eternal Word through whom all things came into existence. He is not "God Junior" or in any way subordinate to God. The Christ is God.

As God decided before creating this universe, the Christ entered time, space and human experience in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. No one can sort out the biology or spiritual physics of that. We just have to accept it as one of the mystical truths of our faith. Jesus is God incarnate, the Christ inside what we experience and know of life.

Jesus' identity as the Christ determined his mission and ministry. As he clearly stated in the synagogue in Nazareth Jesus' job was to

1. deliver good news to the poor,
2. proclaim release to the captives,
3. proclaim recovery of sight to the blind,
4. let the oppressed go free, and
5. proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.<sup>1</sup>

These five points can be posted on flipchart paper or projected onto a screen. Make sure they are readable.

It's easy enough to see how Jesus did this in his earthly ministry, but it is its significance *after* his ascension that should interest us this morning.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 4:18-19.

Jesus' identity as the Christ formed his ministry. It was because of his identity that Jesus did what he did—his preaching, teaching, miracles and death. His life and ministry only unfolded in the way that it did because he was Christ incarnate.

Now, through our faith and baptism, we have been made the inheritors of his ministry. We are Jesus' legacy.

Of course, we all immediately recognize what this means. As Jesus did, so are we to do. His ministry has been made our ministry.

This does not mean we have to do exactly what Jesus did. His context and circumstances are not ours. Ministry is always informed by the context of the ministers and those with whom they minister. Ministry is contextual.

So, we don't do exactly as Jesus did. We minister in our circumstances using Jesus' ministry as our model. In light of Luke's Gospel, we

1. deliver good news to the poor,
2. proclaim release to the captives,
3. proclaim recovery of sight to the blind,
4. let the oppressed go free, and
5. proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.<sup>2</sup>

Considering the fact that we are in the season of our annual general meetings, each congregation in the Diocese of Athabasca would do well to use these five points as the headings in a brainstorming session at the AGM. Write out the headings on separate sheets of chart paper. Give each participant some sticky notes and ask them to write down suggestions for each heading. The prompt for this will be, "How will we put each of these into action in our parish and in our town?" Have the participants place their sticky suggestions on the appropriate chart.

That's all the exercise for the Annual General Meeting. The Vestry will have to take the responses and draft some kind of action plan, with it clearly in mind

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 4:18-19.

that no parish can do all things for all people all the time. The action plan will take the resources of the parish into account—they, too, are part of the context.

Of course, in thinking about these five points, we'll have to apply as broad an understanding of the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed as is practical in each context. We'll also have to understand for ourselves what the "year of the Lord's favour" can actually mean for us. Yes, back in Jesus' day, the law allowed for a year of jubilee in which debts were forgiven, lands restored to the original clans and many other bonuses were granted. But there's no historical indication that this was ever carried out. It is likely that congregations will have to focus their thoughts on the proclamation behind the year of the Lord's favour.

Such an exercise can result in giving the parish a clearer understanding of the path forward in 2025. It may have an impact on the budget, which can be altered by the Vestry after its initial approval. This exercise could give you a lens through which to focus your ministries in this year.

But such an exercise will demand that we take Scripture seriously and that we accept Jesus' identity as the Christ inside time, space and human experience. That sounds easy, because we are so accustomed to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. But we frequently take the identity of Jesus for granted. We frequently lose touch with the earth-shattering reality of God inside our human existence. It is because of the Christ inside time, space and human experience that we can find salvation. It is because of the hard-won salvation of Christ that we love the poor and free those bound by chains of fear and sin. It is because of the reality of Jesus of Nazareth that we seek to uphold the spiritually blind and fight for those who are oppressed. It is because of the Lord's favour we have experienced that we proclaim salvation to the world.

That's what it means to have the Christ as part of our lives. We have been made his inheritors. He has made us his legacy. Thanks be to God.

AMEN.