

Epiphany 3C'19  
27 January 2019  
I Cor. 12.12-27; Lk. 4.14-21  
St. Luke's Episcopal Church  
North Little Rock, Arkansas

O Lord, receive our prayers which we offer before you for all members of your holy Church, that in their vocation and ministry they may truly and devoutly serve you. Amen.<sup>i</sup>

When our bishop, Larry Benfield was consecrated there was a very special guest who was present that day, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the Most Rev. Katherine Jefferts-Schiorri who also holds the distinction of being the first woman presiding bishop in the Anglican Communion. While she was here, she took *some time* to meet with the clergy. She was very articulate and told us some things about herself and the church but seemed even more interested in hearing from us. She asked us three questions that have continued to resonate with me. She indicated that these three questions should be asked and answered by each individual member of a parish and by the *parish as a whole*. The three questions were:  
1) Who are you? 2) Why are you here? 3) What are you doing about it?

These are very good questions because they reveal the need for a process of discernment. As answers are discerned, they can take us to a place of clarity about our identity, our vision and mission. In fact, these are some of the

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<sup>i</sup> BCP, p.100

very same questions that are asked by any successful corporation or business.

Just for the heck of it the other day since I like shoes, Clark's shoes to be exact, I thought I would go to their website to check out their *vision and mission statements*. I thought they did a very good job of answering the *Presiding Bishop's three questions*. Listen to the Clark's shoes corporate vision: *"It's not the building, or the shoes, the designs or the marketing plans. Its people united by a belief that by working hard and working together, we can succeed in a most spectacular way. Our halls are filled with creative, innovative, responsible, risk takers, who love to laugh, share, and listen."* This seems to say a lot about who this company is.

Their mission statement clearly defines why they are here: *"Our passion is to listen to our customers and deliver a product that allows the consumer to feel the pride, respect and trust of everyone at the Clark's Companies."*

Their core values tell us what they are doing to fulfill their *vision and mission*: Start – Integrity is expected from everyone, without that we have nothing. Communicate – Feel free to express yourself, but always with respect and humility. Partner – We make it easy for people to do business

with us. Inspire – We succeed as a team but value the individual. Success enables us to improve the lives of others. And lastly Imagine – Innovation and creative thinking are more important than avoiding risks.<sup>ii</sup>

This secular company knows who they are, why they are here and they are definitely doing something about it – they are selling thousands of pairs of shoes on a daily basis! Thanks to this sermon they might just sell a few more - who knows!

From the scriptures we learn that Christ had to go through a thirty year period of discernment before he was ready to claim his true identity as Messiah and fulfill his three year mission. I've often wondered did Jesus as a young person ever squirm while sitting in the synagogue during the reading of certain prophecies? Did he ever feel a sense of foreboding or stop to think about his future as he nailed together a cross beam in his father Joseph's carpentry shop? There surely was a process - but in today's gospel we see Jesus' moment of clarity when he stands in the synagogue to read from the prophet Isaiah. He declares who he is, why he was here and what he was going to do about it "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has

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<sup>ii</sup> Corporate website for the *Clark's Shoe Company*, Internet: [www.clarkscompanies.com](http://www.clarkscompanies.com)

*anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me 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.*"<sup>iii</sup> Jesus is the anointed one sent by God to preach the Good News to the poor and to heal the sick and the oppressed and to declare that all their sins were forgiven! The Kingdom of God is to overcome the kingdoms of this world.

Into this wonderful vision and mission has the Church, the body of Christ been called. As one writer put it: *Till all the jails are empty and all the bellies filled; Till no one hurts or steals or lies, and no more blood is spilled; Till age and race and gender no longer separate' Till pulpit, press and politics are free of greed and hate; God has work for us to do.*"<sup>iv</sup>

St. Paul reminds us in today's epistle that *we each have a part to play in Christ's mission to the world as baptized members of the body of Christ.* He uses the human body as a striking metaphor of Christ's body reminding us that there are no 'lone ranger Christians' or 'superstar saints.' No part of the body is unnecessary. "The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of

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<sup>iii</sup> Luke 4.18-19, NRSV

<sup>iv</sup> Daw, Carl P. *Synthesis*, Epiphany 3C, January 21, 2007

you.” Even “*the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.*”<sup>v</sup> I learned that lesson the hard way when I broke my little toe while on our honeymoon. Besides being extremely painful, I had trouble staying balanced. I had no idea what a big role such a small part of the body played.

We each have our own unique gifts given to us at baptism and have our own contributions to make to the Church. None are to be discounted. There is no need to diminish what we each bring to the table to share with our brothers and sisters. Just like the Clark’s shoe company we each need one another working hard together in order to succeed.

The priest and author Henri Nouwen reminds us that, “*Often we want to be somewhere other than where we are, or even to be someone other than who we are. We tend to compare ourselves constantly with others and wonder why we are not as rich, as intelligent, as simple, as generous, or as saintly as they are. Such comparisons make us feel guilty, ashamed, or jealous. It is very important to realize that our vocation is hidden in where we are and who we are. We are unique human beings, each with a call to realize in life*

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<sup>v</sup> II Cor 12.12-27 excerpts, NRSV

*what nobody else can, and to realize it in the concrete context of the here and now. We will never find our vocations by trying to figure out whether we are better or worse than others. We are good enough to do what we are called to do. Be yourself!*<sup>vi</sup> With each of us being our best selves and working together – we can!

Who are you, why are you here, what are you doing about it?

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<sup>vi</sup> Nouwen, Henri, J.M. *Bread for the Journey*, (Harper Collins Publishers: San Francisco: 1996) for January 17<sup>th</sup>.