Sermon on Epiphany 3 Year C

On Monday, after our luncheon for our service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity David Sheach and I were standing in the soup line and he said “This cold is starting to get to me.”

“I said yeah, it’s been cold for a while hasn’t it” He said, “No, silly, I mean this cold that I’ve had for awhile, the weather’s been great!”

Wednesday morning, Bob Dunn called Rod Underell and said “Come down to the church and take a few pictures of the bell for the website.” Rod said to Lora, “I’m getting my steel toe boots on, Bob wants me to help move the bell!”

Both classic examples of interpretation in action. The first one, mistaken interpretation; the words a bit ambiguous but still, we were indoors when he said it!

The second, a piece of good interpretation, the words appearing to say one thing but reading between the lines understanding something that was implicit.

An axiom that is as true now as ever is simply that no matter what anyone says, however obvious, whatever anyone has written, however clear, interpretation is inevitable; to refuse to interpret is still to interpret! To choose to interpret is not to guarantee that we’ll get it right!

God has created us to interpret, to learn through the give and take of questions, leading to insight, to mistakes leading to a re-think, a re-read, then more insight. Interpretation presumes at least two, a speaker and a listener, a writer and a reader; it speaks to the fact that we are created for relationship.

Poor interpretation can lead to all manner of falsehoods, to all manner of disasters; think of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet where Romeo kills himself because someone, not in the know of the plan, tells Romeo that Juliet is dead!

Think of how horribly European politicians, with the exception of Churchhill who was a lone, not listened to voice, interpreted Hitler’s actions in the 1930’s!

Wise interpretation however can lead us into truth; in this season, towards an epiphany that changes us or even a society for the better; I think of Martin Luther King Jr. whose wise interpretation of Kennedy’s motives allowed him to stick fast to his plan of non-violent action and so secure civil rights

Good interpretation can make for a just society, interpretation of what allows a community to genuinely reflect God’s will in the world is a matter of reading the scriptures together and using our reason, looking at what the Great Tradition has taught us and thinking carefully about our experience.

When it comes to discernment, it’s all that but it’s also a matter of prayer and the Spirit, taking a risk and taking the plunge.

Ezra and his colleagues read the law and explained it creating not only a new society but in some ways setting the stage for the development of Judaism from that time on.

Jesus stood up in a Jewish synagogue and led by the Spirit took the ultimate plunge, “Today these scriptures have been fulfilled in your hearing!”

If Ezra’s interpretation caused weeping and celebration, Jesus’ interpretation produced both antagonism and loyalty.

Both created and defined community. Both put forward a vision of what God is like and what it means to live in God’s community. From both we learn that God breaks into the status quo.

We’re not the only ones interpreting, God is interpreting himself to us! And we both like what we hear and we don’t like it; it upsets the status quo, the applecart of our carefully constructed religion and understanding.

But here’s the upshot for us today: now in Christ’s body, the Church, we are Christ to each other; or, as Paul says it, parts of Christ so that when we take the risk to be with each other in integrity, not perfection, but integrity we find that God is, again, interpreting the divine nature to us and we’re interpreting Christ to each other and the world.

It’s crazy to say it but the task of our community is, always, to move towards being able to say, “because of Christ’s presence here in our midst, these scriptures are being fulfilled in and through the life of this community!”

In a small way that will only continue to grow I believe this to be true or I wouldn’t continue as your priest; there’s no other reason, really, to be a community of faith.

Today I want to do something a bit different in order to demonstrate this reality that will at first seem sad but will, I think, spur us on to risk relying on the Spirit and taking the plunge of interpretation again and again.

Today we’re saying good bye to David Doerksen and to the Puiu family today. David is moving to Atlanta to take a job with Delta airlines and Keith, Taya, Christian and Babs are moving to Kelowna for a variety of reasons.

We want to bless them for they have been an important part of our spiritual community over the past couple of years. I’ve asked David, Keith and Taya to come forward and share a bit how Christ has been interpreted to them here….

*David what brought you to St. Matthew? What are some highlights of your time here? Additional thoughts?*

*Taya, as a person newly baptized into the body of Christ, how has being involved at St. Matthew encouraged you to keep spiritually exploring? Additional thoughts?*

*Keith, as a cradle Anglican what have you experienced as unique and encouraging here at St.Matthew? Is there any words of advice or encouragement you have for us? Additional thoughts?*

Thanks for your sharing; you’ve also interpreted Christ to us! David, your willingness to join us was/is courageous; the reasons for you being here are heartening to me given the rift this community experienced in the past. You have shared your artistic gifts (new logo; painting); you’ve helped me by critiquing my preaching when I asked.

Taya and Keith, you have blessed us with your kindness, generosity and organizational abilities; all gifts of the Holy Spirit by the way! The Easter egg hunt for families and your organization of the hamper drive this year. Taya you’ve attempted to help us with marketing our parish (we’ll get it yet!).

Thank-you! We pray that wherever you end up worshipping that you find a Church where you’re able to know and serve Christ in and through people; taking your place in this dynamic living organism that is Christ in the world, the Church! Amen.