

From The Pulpit

by Rev. Donald M. Clark

THE MAN WHO PREACHED TO THE POOR

Text: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor." Luke 4:18.

This incident at Nazareth came toward the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The sequence of events is important: his baptism, his temptation in the wilderness, what might be viewed as a bit of experimentation (Luke 4:14, 15), and now an open decision, a declaration of the intention of his soul. He made the announcement with calm deliberation: "There was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias (Isaiah). And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written" (Isa. 61:1,2). He made the announcement, too, with a vivid consciousness of God: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me."



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He made it after a vital experience: "He hath anointed me." He must have caught the significance of the anointing as he reflected upon the custom of his people to anoint prophets, priests, and kings.

Surely, if you desire to find the roots of Christ's intention, you must go back to his silent years.

"He found the place where it was written". He unrolled the parchment scroll to the exact place, Isa. 61:1. He had done this before. He had meditated in depth. What an hour it was when he accepted the prophecy as his own clear call, intention, duty, destiny!

One can never tell what a youth is thinking. The living words of a prophet or poet may be fervent flame in his heart. Such words were those which Jesus found on the scroll and announced as the intention of his soul.

If this is so, the words had long before quickened his powers of observation, of sympathy and empathy. He had begun to observe the poor. There may have been days in his own home when the family sat down to a very frugal meal. There were neighbors in Nazareth who lived in poverty. And some who were better off seemed to live in poverty of thoughts, ideas, feelings, spirit. He learned that men who were rich in things may be proud of spirit, without the meekness which would set the enriching grace of God flowing into their hearts.

The ideas and ideals of a man's maturity do not come by some quick magic; Jesus had been mulling over things, musing, meditating.

Now he arrives at an hour of open decision. It had arrived at the time of his baptism. He had struggled through the ordeal on the Mount of temptation. Think not that it is easy to stand before family and friends, teachers and neighbors, and announce, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor." He knew that "the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. He went on, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

The hour comes when a man must proclaim himself, announce his work, claim his destiny. "I must preach the Gospel to the poor," he said.

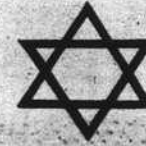
How wonderful it is when youths of high and noble dreams come to their decisions of duty and destiny under the call of God and in the Church of their childhood! How thrilling to have the Church give them blessing instead of standing aghast as did the synagogue at Nazareth. Now he became a man of action.

The days of dreaming became the days of doing. The reflection in the mountains of Judea will now be followed by action in the towns and villages of Galilee. Whether mountaintop experience be that of struggle against Satan or ecstasy in the presence of God, it accomplishes nothing unless there is action in the valley. Dreaming must be followed by doing. Intention asks for fulfillment.

His action was immediate. "He went his way,



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and came down to Capernaum and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine for his word was with power" (Luke 4:30-32).

His Gospel, as the word implies, was good news. It was delivered to the poor, to the meek, to those who were not too proud to receive it.

How often we misinterpret human need! How understanding was Jesus! Study his conversations with individuals to learn how skillfully he preached his Gospel to the poor, to the woman of Samaria, to Nicodemus to Zacchaeus. Their need was not, perhaps, for things, but for a new idea concerning God. And that was his Gospel.

His preaching to the poor became his apology, his vindication, an argument for the authenticity of his anointing. Read Matt. 11:1-6. When John the Baptist began to doubt, Jesus answered, "Go and tell John that the poor have the Gospel preached unto them." Look at that fact and don't stumble.

When he was challenged as to his credentials, he pointed to misery relieved; and the culmination of everything, the crowning feature of his work, he found in his 'good news for the poor.' The phrase he borrowed from Isaiah, but he made it his own. The splendid promises in Isaiah for 'the poor, the broken hearted, captives, blind and bruised,' appealed to him. Time has laid its hand upon his word, and dulled its freshness. 'Gospel' and 'evangelical' are no longer words of sheer happiness like Jesus' 'good news'. They are technical terms, used in handbooks and in controversy; while for Jesus the 'good news for the poor' was a new phrase of delight and inspiration.

This became the Master's charge to his disciples (Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:15; Luke 24:45-48). His followers are to preach the Gospel to the poor. They are to repeat the "Come unto me" which is his invitation. They are to announce that God is the Father of all. They are to proclaim that God loves men and cares for them. They are to tell men about God's Kingdom. And this they are charged to do unto the poor of the uttermost parts of the earth. How great the need for the proclamation of the good news! Are we following out the intention of Christ's soul?

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