

The Spirit of Our God Is Upon All of Us!
Sunday, January 23, 2022, 11:30 a.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Alfredo Feregrino

Eight years ago, around this time in January, with a group of newly ordained priests from my dioceses, I had the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, visiting Israel and the occupied territories in the West Bank.

As part of our pilgrimage, we visited the Old City of Hebron, the largest Palestinian city after Gaza and a city with more than 200 thousand Palestinians and a considerable presence of Israeli settlements.

It is believed that in the Old City of Hebron is where the settlement movement started. Much of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis there comes from the fact that Abraham the father of the Judaism, Christianity and Islam settled in the city of Hebron.

On our way to Hebron, before entering the occupied territory, we saw a big red sign written in Hebrew, Arabic and English languages.

This is what it said:

“The entrance for Israeli citizens is forbidden, Dangerous to your lives, and is against to Israeli Law”.

Wow, even without being an Israeli citizen, the sign was warning us that entering to that territory was “Dangerous to our lives”

(In a way), at that time, as we were moving and leaving the sign behind us, I was feeling that we were indirectly signing a release of liability for our lives, an interesting feeling indeed.

And as we entered the occupied territory in our bus and after seeing piles of garbage bags on the streets, fences fortified with razor wire, and so much poverty and despair, I was in shock.

I was able to witness firsthand the devastating effects of the Israeli military occupation. I was able to see and feel how normal people in a broad daylight were actually being oppressed and treated in such an inhumane way.

And suddenly, out of nowhere, the first gospel passage that crossed my mind (as recorded in my diary) was the words that Jesus spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth reciting the scroll of the prophet Isaiah:

“The Spirit of our God is upon me:

because the Most High has anointed me to bring Good News to those who are poor.

God has sent me to proclaim liberty to those held captive,

recovery of sight to those who are blind,

and release to those in prison;

Maybe this passage crossed my mind because things in this region have not changed much since the time of Jesus. The situation has not changed for the vast majority of the people in that region for centuries. (((And there we are as “tourists” observing and witnessing the suffering of others)))

Yes, the situation has not changed for the vast majority of the people in that region for centuries. And this is also true for many other regions of the world as well.

This is the same passage that the prophet Isaiah used to address the Judean people, who returned from exile in the year 539 BCE after the Persian king Cyrus brought the cruel Babylonian empire to an end.

This is the same region, where the prophet Isaiah anticipated a future of well-being for those people coming from exile and prophesied that those who cannot hear (deaf) will hear the words of a book, that after the shadow and darkness, the eyes of the blind will see. That the lowly will rejoice in God. (Isaiah 29, 35)

And, yes, embedded in the prophetic tradition of his time, many centuries later... Jesus proclaimed liberation to the poor and the oppressed in the same region.

The healing, the restoring of sight and hearing , setting free, proclaiming liberty and bringing good news were different ways of describing liberation.

When Jesus inaugurates his ministry, what he really was offering was liberation.

And it is here where Jesus ask us: Would you like to be healed? Would you like to see? Would you like to be free?

Many times, we have been blind to the fact that we ourselves have been the captives, that we ourselves have been the oppressed, that we are the ones who need healing.

Many times, we have been the ones who have been captive and oppressed to our inner feelings of worth-less-ness, inferiority and shame.

We tend to create stories about ourselves, stories made of false beliefs.

Many times, we have been blind to the fact that we ourselves have been the captives, that we ourselves have been the oppressed.

Yes, we have forgotten that we are the ones in need of liberation.

So I wonder, what do you need liberation from?

Addiction, fear, envy, pride?

What separate you from yourself, your community and from God?

I wonder,

As a community, what do we need liberation from?

Anxiety, doubt, scarcity, anger.

Any of these can imprison us and separate us from one another.

But You know what?

Everything that oppresses us and make us captives, does not have dominion over us.

....And this is good news.

Would you like to be healed? Would you like to see? Would you like to be free?

In his process of liberation, Jesus encouraged and strengthened us to believe that we can do the impossible.

Remember the passage where Jesus challenge the people who cannot walk by issuing a simple command: "Stand and walk"...

Making them agents and co-creators of their own liberation?

Yes, Jesus liberated people to believe that the impossible could happen.

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The scripture tells us that after Jesus finish reading the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, he told the people gathered together in the synagogue "Today the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing".

Yes, Jesus tells us that the scripture has been fulfilled, not yesterday, not tomorrow but today.

The time for liberation is today, right now.

Now, is the time for liberation, now is the time for our liberation.

Today is the day to bring Good News to those who are poor.

To proclaim liberty to those held captive,
to recovery of sight to those who are blind,
and to release to those in prison;

The time for liberation is now!

When Martin Luther King called for racial justice, he wrote from jail specifically to a statement published in a local newspaper by eight white clergymen, calling the protests in Birmingham Alabama as "unwise and untimely" basically saying that the demand for justice was too soon and the time was not right.

MLK wrote in response: We must come to see, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

Yes, the time for justice is always now.

The time for liberation is always today, right now.

And when we work for justice and become agents of liberation the Spirit will be always with us.

We cannot do this alone; we need the power of the Spirit.

And we know that the Spirit will be always at work

and this is what Jesus meant, when he read the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

It was not a coincidence. It was a prophetic moment.

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My trip to Hebron was one of the most impactful experiences of my life.

I will admit to you now that I was so overcome with the heaviness of being in that place that I cried.

Being in Hebron opened my eyes to see firsthand the depth of the human tragedy of occupation and oppression. It was a powerful awakening for me.

Scripture reminds us that if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

So, my invitation for you today as co-creators and agents of Jesus's liberation is to remember that as the body of Christ

The Spirit of our God is upon all of us: in all of us

Because the Most High has anointed us, all of us

To bring Good News to those who are poor.

To proclaim liberty to those held captive, recovery of sight to those who are blind, and release to those in prison;

This is the good news that the gospel proclaims!

AMEN