

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

On the day I turned 21 I sat at my desk at Conception Seminary, wrote my parents' address on an envelope, and grabbed a notecard. I scribbled out the day's date and these words: "Dear Mom and Dad, today I am an adult. Love, Paul." I'm not sure what I was doing or why. It just seemed like the thing to do. Other kids are more intentional. When asserting themselves or resisting something their parents want them to do, they may say something like, "You don't understand me." Often they're not being smart-alecky. They're just being informative. Even the young Jesus made a stunning declaration to his family and friends at the synagogue in Nazareth. Now he knew what he was doing and why.

The gospel according to Luke is the one that we will hear on most Sundays of 2019. Today's reading solemnly opens with Luke's statement of purpose. He is writing at the request of Theophilus, whose name is Greek, not Jewish, and who must have had some money to commission a writer like Luke.

Luke admits that in addition to "eyewitnesses" of Jesus there were "ministers of the word" - non-eyewitnesses - who told others what they had heard of Jesus. Luke also says that "many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the events." We only know of four gospels. Scholars think that Mark wrote first, and that Matthew and Luke both had access to Mark because they reuse his material. Matthew and Luke each had their own sources: At Christmas, for example, Matthew knew about the magi, and Luke knew about the shepherds, but you don't find either group in the other gospel. Matthew and Luke both had some material that Mark did not have - a collection of the sayings of Jesus, such as the Lord's Prayer. That collection has been lost. Scholars call it the Q document, short for the German word *quelle*, meaning "source". If anyone ever finds it, it will be one of the greatest discoveries in the history of Christianity. Please check your cupboards, attics and garages when you get home. Luke declares at the outset that he will write "an orderly sequence," implying that other writers did not. In today's passage Luke introduces Jesus as a reader, and a bit of an editor.

Inside the synagogue at home in Nazareth, having shown up to be the reader at worship as was his custom, Jesus opens the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He reads the first two verses of what we know as chapter 61, but in between them he inserts several verses of chapter 58. He jumps around the scroll to read the verses that apply to him. As Jesus edited Isaiah, the lectionary today edits Luke. The passage we just heard includes the verses from chapter one that introduce Luke and then pole-vaults over to the verses of chapter four that introduce Jesus. Both Luke and Jesus knew what they were doing and why.

Every so often we realize anew who we are and why we are here. Or someone close to us gets this insight. God takes the book of life we thought we knew well and edits it. Such moments of revelation may surprise, challenge or delight. In the worst cases, a new self-discovery disrupts close relationships, but in the best cases, it shapes a future of new joys and responsibilities. I had some idea at age 21 what it meant to be an adult. But if you're like me, you keep learning year by year more and more about what you are doing and why you are here. Being open to that self-discovery - whether within ourselves or inside the people we love - shows a readiness to hear whatever the gospel may say.

Sunday, January 27, 2019