

“P.I.E. Ministry - Participation, Interactive, and Experiential”

Luke 4:14-21

Jesus got involved in all aspects of first century life. In every aspect of his ministry, Jesus got others involved. When Jesus begins his public ministry in today’s gospel text, his level of involvement and interaction is striking.

Having successfully weathered the long days in the wilderness and the scandalous temptations offered by the devil, Jesus turns his face and feet towards his hometown. In verse 14, he “returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country.” The gossip lines were hot. A son of the congregation was coming home and had agreed to be a guest preacher. The sanctuary would be full.

But was this not the same Jesus who had been raised there as a carpenter’s son, although, according to the gossip, his parents were not married when his mother became pregnant. Now he returns in verse 14, “filled with the power of the Spirit,” and “he began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.”

As people in the region of Galilee participated in Jesus ministry, interacted with him, and experienced his teaching and healing, he was “praised by everyone.”

But then, “he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up and went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom.” He takes the time to return to his home church to worship. Now a grown man and observant Jew, he is obviously ready to participate in the synagogue service – including the public reading of the week’s Torah –

not unlike our lectors who come forward to read the assigned scripture for the week.

“He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.” His hometown status coupled with his new reputation “suggested” that those present in the synagogue would be eager to hear him speak.

It looks as though Jesus found the text he wanted to read rather than the assigned text. He unrolled the scroll and “found” the place where it was written. The prophetic text itself is a paraphrase of Isaiah 61:1-2 with the insertion of a phrase from Isaiah 58:6 - “to let the oppressed go free.” Many scholars argue that by combining scriptural texts, Jesus was verbally demonstrating his Spirit-empowered authority. Others say he was simply emphasizing God’s grace and forgiveness. I’m guessing the local rabbis were wincing at his straying from the text as I occasionally wince during the prayers here in Divinity.

But it doesn’t matter. What’s important is participation, interaction, and experiencing the grace of God! What’s important is the P.I.E. What’s important is that after Jesus rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant, and sits down; is that he astounds some and angers others by saying “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus identifies himself as the one anointed with the Spirit of the Lord. The direction of Jesus’ anointed ministry will be to “bring good news to the poor, release to captives, healing to the sick, freedom to the oppressed, and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor to all who will listen.”

In the next verses Jesus confronts his hometown people's unfaithfulness which results in him being driven out of town where they threaten to throw him off a cliff. "But he passes through the midst of them and went on his way."

Jesus participates in the worship, interacts with the people, and experiences their wrath. To minister in a P.I.E. world, to minister in a participatory, interactive, experiential world, to minister in a world where many more people watch talk shows than soaps, to minister in a world where people prefer to watch participatory shows like American Idol and Survivor, to minister in a world where people prefer to cook and serve a meal to the poor rather than writing a check, to minister in a P.I.E. world, we, the church must come to terms with the P.I.E. nature of the gospel.

The degree to which Jesus' participative ethic went can be experienced in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Sharing the bread and the wine, the body and the blood is all about participation, interaction, and experience. Paul understood this when he said to drink the cup means to become a bodily participant in the death of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10 . . . ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

In Holy Communion the participant receives God's gift of love and reconciliation.

Romans 5:8-10 . . . ⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners

Christ died for us. ⁹Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.

Jesus founded his church to be a participative community. And what is the greatest indicator we have of a healthy church? The level of participation. The greater the number of “ministers” with practicing ministries, the greater the health and growth. The fewer the “ministers”, the greater the decline and danger.

Getting involved means “walking slowly.” Jesus taught his disciples then, and Jesus teaches his disciples now, that if we want to develop our spiritual senses and if we want an effective ministry, we need to walk slowly. When we walk slow, whether it be on a mountain trail or down a city street, we notice what’s around us and began to get involved with and interact with the people and creation around us.

On Sunday, December 13, when we took our confirmands to the Redeemer Crisis Center, I walked slowly and this is what I noticed as our confirmands became a part of the P.I.E. ministry of Christ.

We arrived with back ends of our mini-vans and cars packed with Christmas gifts from the Giving Tree, garbage bags full of new socks, and used clothing, and trays of turkey and dressing. Fifteen of our 7th and 8th grade confirmands quickly unloaded our treasures to various areas in Redeemer Lutheran Church.

Our youth joined youth from a local public school to be divided up into working groups. Each group was assigned to a specific task – helping to prepare for the 5:00 dinner downstairs, to work in the food pantry or clothing rooms downstairs, to help sort Christmas presents in the sanctuary upstairs, or to help sort new pillows and bedding in the narthex. It struck me that every space in the church was being used to serve the poor.

Our donated socks were laid out on a table next to another table full of donated coffee cups filled with goodies that would be handed out as folks came in for dinner.

One of the local volunteers, Fred, an older man with an untrimmed gray beard, well-worn stocking cap, and a smile that reveals little or no time in a dentist's office; was complaining to me about the rising cost of bus fares – the base fare being \$2.25, a day pass is \$5.00, and the monthly pass is \$55.00, which Fred said is “totally unreal.” Shirley, one of the older women waiting for the meal, told me of her friend who dropped her off because her pick-up was being repaired which she couldn't afford to pay for. “They won't look at it for less than \$400.” She was waiting in the hallway with other women, scoping out the shelves where they could put in their bags whatever they wanted – books, old toys and games, Christmas decorations and other odds and ends.

As the hallway became more crowded with people escaping the rain outside, I noticed the smell of un-showered bodies with unwashed clothing. They greeted one another with hugs and first names – a community of people dependent on the leftover clothes, new socks, children's Christmas gifts, and the hot meal we were there to share. They worried about rising bus fares and car repair costs the way some of us worry about

mortgage and college tuition costs. Yet here we were, shoulder to shoulder, sharing with one another, smelling one another, talking to one another.

Our youth had nicely set the church basement dinner tables, covering them with green plastic, votive candles burning, candy canes, salt and pepper shakers, small boxes of juicy fruits, and travel tubes of colgate toothpaste.

Carol Naumann and Mary O'Rourke helped keep our group organized and busy, knowing this ministry and its people for many years. Our confirmands benefitted, learning to serve people in a church very different from Divinity. They could return home on Sunday night more thankful and appreciative for how God and their parents have blessed them. And hopefully more willing to share with our brothers and sisters in Christ not nearly as wealthy as we.

We have been blessed with a big piece of the P.I.E. with the opportunity to do P.I.E. ministry that is participative, interactive, and experiential. We can't teach that in a Divinity classroom. It can only be experienced by following the example of Jesus and experiencing the peace of God . . .

#720 We Are Called