

Epiphany 3C  
Luke 4: 14-21  
January 24, 2010  
Christ Church

**I was on my way through the kitchen to the laundry room the other day when I noticed on the table a headline which read, “Why God Hates Haiti.” Of course, I was immediately hooked – compelled to read the article. The writer is Lisa Miller, a religion editor for Newsweek Magazine.**

**No doubt Lisa intended to shock folks like me into reading what she has to say on the topic of Haiti. It worked. I found myself feeling the need to be God’s lawyer – to make sure that God gets a fair hearing.**

**Lisa Miller writes of Haiti’s difficult history. As the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere whose people live on less than a dollar a day, Haiti is uniquely vulnerable. She raises the question that we all carry, “If God is good and**

**intervenes in the world, then why does he make innocents suffer?”**

**She notes several of the public responses we have heard or read in the past week. Most notable, of course, is the commentary of TV evangelist Pat Robertson: the Haitians brought it on themselves. In his broadcast, Robertson referred to the Haitian slave revolt of 1791, when insurgents gathered in a forest to swear a blood oath and engage in voodoo rituals passed on to them by their African ancestors. These practices, Robertson points out, are a violation of the first commandment: “There shall be no other gods before our God.”**

**University of North Carolina Bible scholar Harold Bart Ehrman, who is an atheist, responded angrily to Robertson’s statement: “If that happened to the Haitians because they’re so sinful, then why hasn’t it happened to *him*?”**

**Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*, had his own response to Robertson’s**

**statement: “It is supreme hubris to think you can read God’s mind.” Drawing from the story of Job, Kushner went on to say that “The will of God is not to send us the disaster, but to send us the disaster to overcome.”**

**Terrible disasters like the earthquake in Haiti always challenge our faith. Bart Ehrman became an atheist because he could not reconcile his belief in a loving God with such terrible suffering. Pat Robertson’s explanation misuses Scripture in a narrow and self-righteous way – and seems to ignore Jesus’ commandment in the Gospel of Matthew: “Judge not, lest you be judged.”**

**Finally, neither Robert’s simplistic claims nor Ehrman’s atheism are adequate to discern the nature and purpose of our Creator. Our finite human paradigms cannot begin to explain the intricacies of the creative process by which we have come into being.**

**Those of you who are creators – artists, writers, engineers, mechanics, musicians – know something about the**

**messiness of creativity. There are many wrong turns and dead ends to navigate in the creative process. And yet, there are also those miracle moments of being in the flow of something much greater than ourselves – an energy force that moves through the artist – bringing into being something quite new and wonderful. We know not how.**

**The Gospel of John tells us that God, our Creator, is love: a love that renders freedom to the beloved. Our freedom allows for our mistakes, our sins – a messy business to be sure. The creative process requires both discipline and openness – but not absolute control. Were God to control every aspect of our lives, there would be little room for creativity or love. Rather, God continues to create the universe – and we play a part in that ongoing creative process.**

**What does it mean to be a part of God's creative work? Luke gives us some idea of it in today's Gospel lesson. Jesus, attending synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, takes one of the readings of the day – much like our lectors do. Jesus reads**

from the Scriptures he was taught as a child – the ancient prophet, Isaiah.

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

Jesus has been presented in the Temple. He has been formed and shaped in the Hebrew faith tradition. And he has been baptized by John the Baptist. At this point in the story, he is beginning his ministry. This is what it will look like. This is how Jesus will participate in God’s creative process.

But, Jesus’ pivotal proclamation of Isaiah in the synagogue is not simply a historical event in Jesus’ life. It is not meant as a one-time revelation for there and then. Isaiah’s prophecy is for us, the Body of Christ, here and now.

**Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, so beautifully explains our relationship with Christ and with each other. We are many parts, but at the same time we are one Body. By our Baptism, we are One in the Spirit of Christ. Christ lives on in and through us – from our youngest members – like Charlie Jordan, soon to be baptized, to our elders.**

**We stand in awe of the mystery and wonder of such a relationship. This past week, I went for an eye exam. As I was waiting for the ophthalmologist, I studied the charts on the wall – one in particular showed a cross-section of the eye – it was fascinating.**

**When the doctor came in the examining room I asked if over the years he had come to take for granted the construction of the human eye. Smiling, he replied, “there are thousands of tiny nerve fibers at the back of the eye – like so many tree branches. Each one of the fibers connects to a link in the brain, making it possible for us to see. Science is unable to duplicate it.”**

**We, the Body of Christ, are so many such miracles – each one intricately and equally important to the other. Together in this miraculous network, we carry on the creative work of God. What is that work? Imagine that God has sent you and me a text message:**

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me*

*Because he has anointed me*

*To bring good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives*

*And recovery of sight to the blind,*

*To let the oppressed go free,*

*To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*