

Rev. Kerbel: Please join me in the spirit of prayer.

Rev. Kerbel: Gracious God, we give you thanks that you are renewing our spirit day by day even as our outer nature is wasting away. May your life be born in us again and again even as we die to those cells that hold us back. In your Christ, we ask it. Amen.

Congregation: Amen.

Rev. Kerbel: Please be seated. Morning!

Congregation: Morning.

Rev. Kerbel: Well I think the reading from Samuel cries out for a word this morning. And I'll just put it like this. I'm gonna approach the Hebrew scripture this morning as a craft project. Take your bulletin home. You'll need a pair of scissors, an envelope and a stamp. Carefully cut out the reading from Samuel. Fold it carefully and place it in the envelope and mail it to your elected official of choice. I did not tell you who to send it to. Our non-profit status is intact.

Rev. Kerbel: We're celebrating this morning the deacon over the door, Nellie Green. I just love this window that we have blessed today. We have a wonderful deacon in Carol Duncan, who's the very model of a deacon. And she sends us forth every week with joy to do the mission we're given to do in Christ's name and now she has backup. 'Cause as we leave through the south door we leave under Nellie. And Nellie is gonna remind us in a continuation of her ministry's deacon what we do next.

Rev. Kerbel: We live a life of mission in the world. We live a life of mission in the world. In fact, the window includes her mission statement, which I love. She says, and this is in the border around the window, "My mission is to encourage, enlighten and inspire with humor and compassion all whom I meet so they will know their value as children as God."

Rev. Kerbel: I encourage us all to write a mission statement for ourselves like that. As a people we have a mission. We have a mission to represent Christ in the world. To represent Christ and his compassion and His love and His care. We have a mission to represent Christ in His redeeming, reconciling, renewing justice for all people. And every Sunday we'll be reminded of that mission when we pass through that door and the ministry of Nellie will continue. For generations.

Rev. Kerbel: I love that her mission is in that window because in our Gospel this morning we are directed towards the mission statement of Jesus. If you were going to ask somebody what is the mission statement of Jesus you would probably not go to the Gospel of Mark. You'd probably immediately flip to the Gospel of Luke. Oh no, the priest has a Bible in his hands. He's preaching with a Bible in his hands. This is terrifying. But you would of course turn to Luke where Jesus proclaims

using the words of 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 jubilee."

Rev. Kerbel: Or you might turn to the Gospel of Matthew in Chapter five, the Beatitudes, for a mission statement of Jesus. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.

Rev. Kerbel: In Luke, in Matthew, we can see why the crowds could not leave Jesus alone. We can see why the crowds pressed in upon Him so he could not even eat his lunch with His disciples. They wanted to be in that near presence of God. Liberated and set free as Jesus preached. Set free from oppression that they knew too well. They clamored for Jesus because they clamored for freedom. They clamored to be set free from oppression. We see why Jesus could not even finish his lunch. They needed Him. Desired Him so desperately.

Rev. Kerbel: And we see this mission statement again in Mark and that's our Gospel reading for today. The mission statement of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is to bind up the strong man. To bind up, tie up the strong man is His ministry. In Mark, the ministry of Jesus is envisioned as an incursion, as a home invasion into a home that is being dominated and controlled by a bully. By an oppressive force personified as the strong man who, labeled as Satan in the Hebrew word meaning adversary, as in the adversary of God. He's trying to create a world without God with effects we know all too well if we study the scripture. It is into this house controlled by the strong man that Jesus comes with His mission to bind up the strong man, to set the people free from oppression and so they flock to Him. The people flock to Him and fill up the house where Jesus is a different sort of power, of power that sets free. A power that restores dignity. A power that gives life and joy to all people.

Rev. Kerbel: We see in the reactions to Jesus how radical He was. We see in the reactions to Jesus what a stir He created. The religious authorities found Jesus entirely upsetting. In fact, they called Him Satan. The religious authorities were so tied up and compromised with the powers that be, were so tied up in the status quo, with the oppressive powers that they had lost the ability to see what God was doing right in front of them. In fact, they mistook Jesus for opposition to God.

Rev. Kerbel: Then on the other side we had Jesus' family who are so upset and worried about Him and who would not be because Jesus, by challenging the strong man, is putting His life in danger. He is bringing a threat on himself. It seems like a suicide mission from the family's perspective and so they are trying to pull Him

out of this situation. They're trying to protect Him. They're trying to get Him out because He's being labeled as insane. He's being labeled as Satanic. He's disruptive. He's a challenge to the status quo that must be subdued by the strong man. That upsetting, discomforting power of Jesus is something we are blessed to embrace because it's what tips us into change. It's what tips us into growth. It's what tips us into transformation when held by love we can hear the uncomfortable word from Jesus that we can be set free from the bully who rules this world.

Rev. Kerbel: One of the things I love about the story of Nellie Green is how she gave us a model of what it means to bind up the strong man. 'Cause what Jesus wants is a community that works with Him to continue His work of binding up that strong man by naming the forces of oppression and by acting in new liberating life giving ways that replace the ways of the strong man. And we saw Nellie do that. One of those ways is depicted in this window. That window shows a moment at the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 2000 in Denver when Nellie challenged the church. When Nellie challenged the church and some of the bullies therein. They wanted her to be a deacon at this one mass during the convention. And you might say, "Well that's some progress. That's including somebody. That's diversity." But they said to her, "You sit here in your wheelchair and someone else will read the Gospel for you." And Nellie said, "No way. I'm gonna read the Gospel through my speech machine", which is depicted on her lap in that window. It's not a laptop. It's a speech machine. "And people will hear my voice through this machine proclaiming the Gospel." And she fought for that ability, for her voice to proclaim the Gospel in that place. And because she was Nellie, she won.

Rev. Kerbel: And our church heard the Gospel proclaimed for the first time through a speech machine. Another step towards dignity. Another step towards liberation. Another step for embrace of the whole of humanity. They also wanted to have Nellie up at the altar at the convention, but the altar was on top of lots of steps. And they thought, "Oh we'll just carry you up on your wheelchair, Nellie." And Nellie said, "No way." She said, "You're gonna build a ramp." Nellie cost the National Church some money. And some time and some effort. And she opened up that space to actually welcome and recognize the full dignity of people with different needs. And she celebrated up at that altar not just as a token but as a full human being. This was Nellie's way of challenging the strong man. The bully that puts aside those who might be called trouble makers. She named the oppression. She acted to create new realities that showed God's Kingdom more fully that pushed the strong man, the bully aside.

Rev. Kerbel: This is our calling friends. This is what we're called to do. We're called to hear that uncomfortable voice and say yes, we see God's liberating work happening and we will join it even if there's a cost. Even if there's pain. Nellie spoke that word to this very church. She was ordained here in this space, yet no ministry was found for her here. No ministry was found for her in any Episcopal church in the diocese. Something we need to repent from and learn from. Thank God for

Chestnut Hill United Church that was blessed by 23 years of her ministry that we missed. God's gain, our loss.

Rev. Kerbel: She also agitated us to build that ramp out there. That ramp took 30 plus years to get built. Why? Because people were concerned about how it would look on the building. So our aesthetics got in the way of our mission, which is maybe the cardinal sin of Episcopalians. I think the Lutheran saying is salvation by grace through faith. The Episcopal saying, to our shame is salvation through good taste. But she challenged us on that and taught us to put mission ahead of aesthetics. And she was one of the first people up that ramp. And in my office I have a beautiful picture of her smiling from ear to ear being pushed by blessed Helen White up that ramp. It's a cherished possession of mine.

Rev. Kerbel: So let Nellie be for us a sign that God is in that agitation and that we must grow spiritually through worship, through prayer, through study, through fellowship, through community to gain the listening ears, the seeing eyes, the discerning heart to know when God is acting in front of us. For the sin against the Holy Spirit mentioned in Mark is just this. It is the sin of denying God's work when we see it. Denying God's work when we see it and attributing it to other powers.

Rev. Kerbel: So when we catch ourselves dismissing or diminishing or pushing away the voices of liberation that make us uncomfortable, when we push those voices away let us think is this God's action liberating the world in front of me? And I need to welcome it. No matter the discomfort. No matter the disease. Is this God at work? Making the world more like God's Kingdom and less like the household of the strong man? Amen.

Congregation: Amen.