

3<sup>rd</sup> Week of Epiphany  
January 22/23, 2022

The captives have been released the blind have received sight, and those oppressed have been freed. Jesus is the fulfilment of the prophecy. If there is still captivity, blindness, and oppression, to what then is Jesus speaking? Our Lord cannot lie, so where we find a difference of perception, we do well to shift our thinking.

We know that the Gospel of our Lord is for all people. We also know that we do not fight against flesh and blood, but against forces of darkness. We are in the midst of a spiritual battle. There are three things that are important for us to understand as followers of Christ. First, that we were born into captivity, to sin, death, and the devil. Many in this world deny that, but we who believe know it to be true. The second is that we see things through our eyes. We are born blind to the truth. I tell you that Jesus is present with us, for He said, “Whenever two or more are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” Some will say that unless they see with their own eyes . . . but then, that is the problem, isn’t it. We want to see things on our terms, but the universe is very mysterious and the God who created it all must be all the more mysterious. We need to have our blindness healed. “As many as see the light, to them He gives the power to become children of God.” The third is that this world seems to move from oppression to oppression. There are those who scramble to the top and hold others down. It seems to be a constant game of playing ‘King of the Hill.’ Leaders come and go and the scramble continues. We need to be freed from the insanity. Though we might be incarcerated in a prison for our faith, we are free in Christ. That freedom is forever.

For these things and more, our Lord and Savior has come. He saves us from ourselves – that is, our sinful, self-serving self. He unbinds the captivity of sin, whose demand is death. He opens our eyes to begin to see things as they have been created to be. As many as see the light, He grants the power to move on a journey from where we are to where we are meant to be. The restlessness within us all for something more is the gift of God which begins the stirring of our hearts to seek to live as life is meant to be lived.

Take these ideas and couple them with the reality that we are all quite individual. No two people are alike. The world presses in on us, seeking to conform us to whatever the ideal of the day might be. From what we wear to what entertains us, we are shuffled along like sheep being led to the slaughter. From these things Jesus has come to untangle the mess so that we may live humbly and simply as life is meant to be lived.

Our individualism creeps in and it splits us apart. We have been called to follow the One Lord as a part of His bride, the one church, as one body for the sake of sharing the Good News with as many as receive the light. We all have our ideas of how things are supposed to be and that is the place where, amongst the larger groups as well as individual congregations, we disagree and the unity is clouded, even torn asunder. But it need not be this way and in eternity, it shall not be this way. We may not all agree as to how the Lord is working, but all people of faith agree that the Lord is working. We not agree as to how things will end in this world, but people of faith agree that the Lord will return and usher in His eternal reign.

The world may react, as it did with Jesus, with indignation. In fact. The world does. Except for those who believe, the world says that God, the Creator of all things showing up as a mere man is preposterous. But this is at the heart of the Gospel which you have heard and believe. The world, filled with arrogance, cannot abide by God being humble and willingly dying in our stead. The world wants a powerful warrior who conquers with might. Our faith

reveals God who conquers death with weakness. The world would drive God over the edge, seeking to be forever rid of Him. The world is crazy. The craziness stops short of the simple fact that if all things have their being in God, then if God ceased, so would everything else. One of the many glaring realities that seems to elude the devil and all of those who follow the broad road which leads to destruction.

There is something you need to know about what is observed here. There is a level of genuine concern and care, one for the other. Sure, we have experienced our pains, disappointments, and frustrations, but there is a spirit here which is good. It is godly. The fellowship is to be a reflection of the body of Christ. Love and compassion are to reign. As much as any other place, and, in certain circumstances, better than some others, the Holy Spirit has knit together, amidst the individual diversity, a fellowship that reflects the Spirit of Christ. He has come to pull His people together in a world that seeks to tear each other apart. God unifies. The wicked diversify in order to destroy. But, and hear this clearly, this does not mean that we are not individuals. In fact, in the freedom of Christ we find a greater sense of the self and the true freedom which Christ grants through grace.

Even if the world were to seemingly overcome – and at times it has seemed as though they have – you are privy to the truth that Christ has already overcome the world. The time in which we now abide is the time when Jesus is subjecting all things to Himself to lay at the Father's feet. The final thing to be overcome is death. Why do you doubt? Do not look at the world for your example, but come out from under the yoke of this world and live in the freedom of Christ. Not free to do as you please – for that is a false illusion of this world – but free to live as you have been created to live. You are living in the year of the Lord's favor. He who began a good work in you shall carry it on to completion. Press on! For we know the tribulation produces endurance and endurance produces character, character produces hope, and that hope cannot disappoint us for we know that Christ lives. Because He lives, we know that to live is Christ and to die is gain. Therefore, come to the Lord and ask the Lord of the harvest, for He delights in giving good gifts to His children.

The world calls for us to be comforted by the crowd. Our Lord comforts by joining us with Him. God's law is good, a reflection of His perfect character. Living together – and this is the real aim of every fellowship – teaches us that we are a part of the family of God. We do not seek conformity to anything other than to be conformed to the image of Christ. Some like to dance and sing, praising the Lord with hands lifted up. Some like to be quiet, reserved, perhaps saying nothing at all. Each according to the call of the One and same Holy Spirit which enlivens us all to be on this journey of faith. We, of the body of Christ, need each other. The Lord has placed us right where we are for His purpose. Rejoice and be glad that our Lord who will not stop until you are like Christ already has all that is needed in place.

Yes, this is an ordinary church, in an ordinary town, filled with ordinary people. That is what the world says. The Lord has made all who are in Him extraordinary, for in Christ we are inheritors of the eternal kingdom.

Do not chafe when you hear the word of the Lord. Do not live in the fantasy of this world, but live in the truth our Lord has revealed knowing that in former times the Heavenly Father spoke through the prophets of old, but that now in these last days He has spoken through His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In His light you have been set free, see what is right and true and are no longer tossed about by the oppression of this world. Cherish the One who has saved you through faith and by grace. Thanks be to God! Amen.