

4th Week of Epiphany

January 29/30, 2022

When I was seven, my sisters and I wanted to go swimming after lunch. Those were the days when we were told that you needed to digest your meal for an hour after eating lest you get cramps while swimming and perhaps drown. I never experienced that nor heard of another who had, but hey, the world has a way of perpetuating certain things. We were camping by a lake and wanted to go swimming. We pressed so hard that one of us asked a question and in her exasperation my mother said, “Go jump in a lake,” which we all did. We all survived that day, not a single cramp reported.

The crowd said, “Hey, this is just one of the ordinary townspeople, how can He say such a preposterous thing. The truth is that each of us the capability of saying preposterous things. Jesus always spoke the truth. Some don’t like the truth and they become outraged. One of the greatest testimonies for me in all of Scripture about Jesus are not necessarily the words of Scripture (great as they are), but a couple of the men the Holy Spirit chose to write for Scripture. James and Jude, the Epistle writers, were brothers of our Lord. Not just brothers and sisters as in the body of Christ, but blood kin. I have four sisters, three still living, and they can tell you all about my character as a child. My apologies to those who were only child, but you who had at least one sibling or more know how amazing it is that two of Jesus kin, along with Thomas, also called Jesus, “My Lord and my God.” Now that’s a testimony!

The unbelieving are outraged at the idea that God would be born in the first century in an obscure village to a woman who claimed to be a virgin and yet with child and a man who willingly went along with that notion. The unbelieving cannot fathom God showing up as a human, let alone in such circumstances, but that is exactly what He has done. The world looks at the individual and cannot believe that this person, or really any person can be so wrapped up in faith that they would willingly lay down their life for another. But we have witness after witness who has done just this. In fact, the Greek word we say is the word for witness is the word, literally, from which we get the word martyr. To lay down our life for the sake of the Lord is exactly what our faith is all about. Rather than fighting to live – as the world does (and so far, it has been a one hundred percent failure) – we die in order to live. We die to sin, death, and the devil. Our hope is not in ourselves, but in the One who made us.

Through all that has ever happened, or in this age ever will, there are those who will turn to the Lord and those who will not. Two criminals on the cross, one to the right and one to the left, one of who asked Jesus to remember him and the other who cursed Jesus. This is the strange way of sinful humanity. Some see the hope of salvation and others want what they want on their terms. It has been this way across recorded history. Each of us holds a position as those two criminals did – and this irritates the unbelieving – but when all is said and done, we will either trust the Lord or else we will not.

Jesus spoke plainly and reminded the people that day (and us) that crowds often do not like what they hear or see. Only one woman in Sidon was given relief amidst a famine by the Lord through Elijah. It was not an Israelite who was healed of leprosy, but a General of the conquering army who was healed. It is not the self-righteous who will inherit the kingdom of God, but those who humbly submit to the reality that the Lord is Lord of all and over all. When sinners hear the truth, they often react with rage. “How dare you tell me this!”

I’ll grant you that none of us likes to hear the truth when it is unpleasant to our ears. But rage? How often have you experienced people who rage? Why, there’s a thing called road-rage these days. It is the expression of complete abandonment to selfishness. It is the epitome of

what sin can and does do. The call of the Lord is one of repentance, that is, moving in the opposite direction. Although we may understand the tug upon us to be outraged, we are called to be meek, for this is what meekness truly is: resisting rage and living with the reality of things, especially when you are not pleased with the reality. We are called from selfishness to selflessness.

Love calls us beyond ourselves, in fact, calls us to give up our selves for the sake of the other. It really does not matter what abilities we have, but our willingness to lay down our lives for the other that produces a long lasting and fulfilling love relationship. Have you ever noticed how short lived the marriages of the beautiful people of Hollywood are? They seem to have everything except the ability to live in a loving relationship. Sure, there are exceptions, but that seems to be what they are, exceptions. If we are boastful, arrogant, and unkind, why would someone want to put up with that? But, God does this with us so that we may have the opportunity to join with Him and become like Him. Mind you, it is for a season, that which we call this life, in order that we may have the chance to chose which side we're going to be on. Either we will continue in the illusion that we can be masters of our own destiny, or else, come to the place where we see the light of the world shining upon us and join with the One who created all things.

So much of this age is filled with childishness. Yes, we are called to come to the Lord as a child, but not to be childish. We are called children of God and as such, do not have the reasoning capabilities of seeing clearly the full truth of God. It begins with being able to grasp the idea that God would show up in ordinary guise. He has. The next time it will be no guise, but He will come in full power, displaying His might. It will then be too late to choose which side you want to be on.

Many times, presiding over a wedding – much rarer these days with people not getting married anymore – this passage from Corinthians is spoken. If the couples pledging their vows to each other would only heed the words of godly wisdom, they would fare so much better. But you and I have the opportunity to see that these words are not just about marriage, but really about the marriage feast to which we have been invited – the marriage feast of the Lamb. All that we are able to do in this life, all of our abilities and accomplishments are nothing compared to the surpassing worth of the salvation which we shall inherit. The gifts of God far outweigh anything we could ever do – for who can compare who we are with the One who made all things. Yet, we hear here the Good News that God is patient and kind, bearing all things in order that we might have the opportunity to join with Him in an eternal loving relationship. God, through the gift of salvation, gives us hope to bear all things, believe all things, understand that all things are in His hands. As to the other, they will pass away when the new order of things is eternally established in Eternity where Christ shall reign forever. When He comes, the partial shall be done away and we shall be made complete even as He is complete unto Himself.

We are encourage to abide in the three great theological virtues: faith, hope, and love knowing that the greatest of these is love. To have faith is to trust God above all things, just as the first commandment instructs us. To have hope is to live knowing that the promises of God are true and will come to pass, just as He said. To love is to learn how to love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. We have before us the great and glorious truth, shared, so that we may go out into the world with the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. Keep your hearts and minds upon the Lord, for you are always on His mind. Thanks be to God! Amen.