

2-7-2021 5th Sunday of Epiphany

Welcome, friends, to our Epiphany season worship here on February 7th.
We begin in the name of God, Abba Imma, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

We invite your truth, your clarity in our lives this day, O God, that we might receive and receive the wisdom of your spirit. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

The texts for today are intending to fulfill us with a sense of majesty of God, the grandeur of which we get to be a part.

From **Isaiah chapter 40: [21-**

*Do you not know? Have you not heard? Was it not told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood how the earth was set on its foundations?
God sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, the inhabitants of which look like
grasshoppers.
God stretches out the heavens like a cloth, spreads them like a tent to live in.
God reduces the princes of the earth to nothing, the tyrants of this world are
driven out.
Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the
soil,
then God blows on them and they wither, and the storm carries them away like the
chaff.
'To whom can you compare me? Who is my equal?' asks the Holy One. 'Lift your
eyes and look:
who created the stars? Who leads them out in your glorious array, summoning
each one of them by name?
So mighty is God's power, so great God's strength, that not one star fails to
answer.
How can you say, friends, how can you repeat, O Israel,
'My way is hidden from God, my rights are ignored by my God'?*

*Do you not know? Have you not heard?
Yahweh is the everlasting God, who created the remotest parts of the earth.
God does not grow tired or weary, God's understanding is beyond fathoming.*

*God gives strength to the weary, strengthens the powerless. Young people grow tired and weary,
the young, they stumble and fall, but those who hope in Yahweh will regain their strength. They will
mount up like eagles. They will run and not grow weary.
Though they walk, they will never tire.*

Psalm 147 for today continues the very spirit of the prophet Isaiah.

Close your eyes if you wish; sink back into this psalm inviting us to bathe in the glory of God's universe.

*How sweet to sing to you, O Lord,
and to thank you for all of your blessings.
You rebuild what has been ruined
and recreate what was lost.
You heal the brokenhearted;
you are medicine for our wounds.
You lift up the afflicted
and give them the courage to endure.
You count the myriad stars
and call each one by its name.
Infinite is your power,
incalculable your wisdom.
You cover the sky with clouds,
and send down your rain to the earth,
making grass grown on the hills
and plants to nourish humankind.
You give the wild animals their prey;
you feed the young ravens when they cry.
You delight in the power of the horse
and take pleasure in the legs of an athlete.
But most, you rejoice in an open heart
and in those who let you shine through them.
You give them joy in your joy,
and you bless their loves with your love.*

*You bring peace to their families
and grant them your infinite wealth.
You send your wisdom to their minds;
your light runs faster than a thought.
Above all others they are blessed,
because they can hear you speak
(although your love speaks in all people,
in the silence of every heart).*

Praise to God who is; praise to the God who was; praise to God who is to come for ages unending. Amen.

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The New Testament lesson, **First Corinthians, chapter 9.**

*Paul says, 'So, though I was not a slave to any human being, I put myself in servitude to all people to win as many as I could.
To the Jews, I made myself as a Jew. For those under the Law, as one under the Law, in order to win those under the Law.
To those outside of the Law, as one outside the Law, though I am not outside of the Law. To the weak, I made myself weak
to win them. I accommodated myself to people with all kinds of different situations, so that by all possible means I might bring
some the hope of salvation. All this I do for the sake of the Gospel that I may share its benefits with others.'*

And from **the gospel of Mark, chapter one.**

*They went as far as the Capernaum, and at once on the Sabbath, Jesus went away to the synagogue and he began to teach.
And after teaching he left the synagogue. He went with James and John straight to the house of Simon and Andrew. Now
Simon's mother-in-law was in bed and feverish, and at once they told him about her. Jesus went to her, took her by the hand
and helped her up. And the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

That evening, after sunset, they brought to him all who were sick and those who were possessed by devils. The whole town came crowding around the door, and Jesus cured many who were sick with diseases of one kind or another; and he drove out many kinds of devils, but he would not allow them to speak, because they knew who he was.

In the morning, long before dawn, Jesus got up and left the house and went off to a lonely place and prayed. Simon and his companions set out in search of him, and when they found Jesus they said, 'Everybody is looking for you.' He answered, 'Let us go elsewhere, to the neighboring country towns, so that I can proclaim the message there too, because that is why I came.' And he went all through Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out devils.

The word of God. Praise to you, O Christ.

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Today's texts ask, 'What is success?', and, 'Is God successful?' The gospel story is very simple, straightforward, takes place in Capernaum. Capernaum. Bev and I got to visit there. They've excavated Peter's home, and the Franciscans have built a magnificent church both around and over the top of this excavated home, where Peter's mother-in-law had a fever. Jesus helped her up. The fever left; she went back to serve. The home was inundated with people after dinner. Jesus healed many of them. The next morning, long before dawn, he rises, goes to a lonely place to meditate, to pray, to be with God, to rexxx Peter and the others find him. 'You're a hit. They love you! The crowd loves you!' And Jesus says, 'It's time to move on. I've come to share the message wherever I can.' And off they go.

We believe, teach, that the very magnificence of the entire universe created through the compassionate word of God, the very Cosmic Christ, to whom all life

belongs, has become human in Jesus. All of that--the stars, the heavens spread like a tent--so that we can have simple stories about healing mothering-laws? Yeah, the gospel gets rich, deep, and always personal. The Incarnation would have us commit ourselves to healing of the universe by the very pragmatic caregiving that needs to happen for one another.

One of the strangest difficulties is how the church has not just reduced the experience of the Cosmic Christ and Jesus into formulas and ordinary religion, but has often blinded us to the very work of Christ, and our own calling in the community of disciples.

Here are a few examples:

Instead of the dream of Jesus and the reign of God seizing our imaginations to recreate life in the very glory of God's endless compassion, we reduce the work of Jesus to a salvation game, 'And if you don't succeed, you go to hell'.

How trite! This one who came to work with all, but especially the poor, the oppressed, the ill, to recreate the Beloved Community, in which we were all created. Instead of preaching the Resurrection, the greatest event in history, profoundly taking us beyond everything we understand about ourselves and life, we talk merely about the immortality of the soul. *Do you think there is life after death? And, probably nice people are the only ones who actually get into heaven.*

Instead of preaching, presenting, the Real Presence--the vital engagement of Jesus in life--we turned it into a some philosophical, theological exploration. The very Creed itself says nothing about the life, message, work, and why Jesus was killed. It just says he was born and he died, missing the heart of the story. We hollow out the mystery of the Incarnation itself, the very gutsy struggle of Jesus to liberate humanity. We almost pass over the story of his own assassination. Instead of strengthening the community, we've tended to emphasize the hierarchy of power: clergy, lay people. *Don't leave your place, please.*

Instead of the communion of goods, that life is to be shared in all of its material wealth, we abhor the topic of economic justice in the church. *'That should be left alone'*, and *'people can make their own individual decisions'*; of course, completely ignoring the Book of Acts, chapters 2 and 4.

And, instead of exploring the mystery of God in this Trinity-- three persons-- this Cosmic dance of love, which has summoned us into life, which Isaiah and the psalmist today are simply knocked out in praise of what we are a part of, we limit and reduce God to the Father, which works well for authoritarian leaders, who *doesn't* need anyone, right? *All-powerful, all-knowing--doesn't need the Son, right?*

And then we talk about Jesus as basically a solo act, a great hero. *What's he need the Father for?*

And we make the Holy Spirit optional. *'I'm not really sure if we should include Spirit'*, whereas Scriptures and Tradition make clear it is the Spirit who is giving us creativity, and innovation, and imagination, moving where it will, disturbing the norms of the day, toppling tyrants. Those engaged in the life of the Spirit, and the way it can change, and move, and improvise, and create justice seemingly where it wasn't possible. Those caught up in the spiritual paths have always had difficulty persuading those in organized, institutionalized entities (?) or positions in the church.

Paul says so clearly (we had this text a couple weeks ago), *'Do not stifle the Spirit because our lives and the very spiritual community itself depends upon the Spirit for understanding and inspiration. Do not stifle the Spirit.'*

How often do we take that to heart?

God is not far removed from us. God is a love, living communion with life, and stirring every new life into existence.

As spiritual community we're always looking for new openings, new connections. That's what we hear in Paul today. *'With Jewish friends, I try to connect inside of them--the Jewish-rooted identity in faith. With interfaith friends, the same. Those who are poor, those who are outsiders, I try to connect with them where they are, that we might evolve together and awaken our connectivity, and the healing that God would give to all of us.'*

Jesus did not seek death, nor did he try to meet the religious standards of his time. He loved life. He lived for the dream of God come true. God does not desire

his death. What the Abba Imma wanted was the faithful response of love, which Jesus lives in to amid tears and anguish. Even to the very end of life, he remains true to the dream, true to his friends, true to Abba Imma.

We are not left alone. We are left with a God who does not fit our standards of success. Thank God.

In his book Tattoos on the Heart, Father Greg Boyle made these comments.

We stand with the least likely to succeed until success is succeeded by something else, far more valuable. We stand with the least likely to succeed until kinship is formed, until community becomes real, until they and we know that we belong to each other. We can therefore stand for the belligerent, and the vulnerable, and the unlovable, recognizing that they are deeply wounded and in need of our love and care that the very gifts they have been given might be resurrected in their own lifetime for their joy and for the service of others. We see in the humiliated, in the scapegoats, in the impoverished, we see in each other at Peace and beyond, we see in our own children and families, what they don't see in themselves. We keep seeing, and perceiving, and reminding—until our loved ones do see it--that they, too, are beloved children of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen

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Today we pray for:

Betty Watson,

Ed Klitsch,

Drew, Dale, Seth and Denis,

Dana Squire,

Bob Worthington,

Ann Gray,

Bob Mantei,

Don (now in hospice);

For Rich Larson, Marshall Moore,
Stanley Ngesa, Doug Shuffield,
Doreen Wallbrecher,
for Cory and family
for John Dahlin,
for Catherine,
for Karen, Kyle, Tim,
Heather, George, and Grant.

God in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Strengthen our resolve to become more of what you see in us: beautiful,
wounded, hurting, creative,
the loved children of God.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious
to you. The Lord look upon you with favor. Amen.

[Martha Mantei sings Bless the Lord my Soul]

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