

**Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**January 30, 2022**

Even if we cannot gather in person, Emmanuel God is with us.

I'll be honest – I am writing this on Friday night before the storm comes, so I am trying to write quickly – largely because I am assuming we will lose power tomorrow. By the time you read this on Sunday, the storm will be passed, and we will be shoveling out from whatever we may get. Remember your neighbors. Check in with them, perhaps offer to help shovel if they can use the help – do what you can for each other. Working together, the effects of any storm can be overcome!

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
*And blessed be God's kingdom, now and forever. Amen.*

Let us pray.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Lord be with you.  
*And also with you.*

Let us now pray the collect of the day.

*Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

**First Lesson**  
**Jeremiah 1:4-10**

The word of the Lord came to me saying,  
"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
and before you were born I consecrated you;  
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But the Lord said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';  
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,  
and you shall speak whatever I command you,  
Do not be afraid of them,  
for I am with you to deliver you,  
says the Lord."

Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the Lord said to me,

"Now I have put my words in your mouth.  
See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,  
to pluck up and to pull down,  
to destroy and to overthrow,  
to build and to plant."

**The Psalm**  
**Psalm 71:1-6**

1 In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;  
let me never be ashamed.

2 In your righteousness, deliver me and set me free;  
incline your ear to me and save me.

3 Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe;  
you are my crag and my stronghold.

4 Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked,  
from the clutches of the evildoer and the oppressor.

5 For you are my hope, O Lord God,  
my confidence since I was young.

6 I have been sustained by you ever since I was born;  
from my mother's womb you have been my strength;  
my praise shall be always of you.

**New Testament**  
**1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

**The Gospel**

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Luke.  
*Glory to you, Lord Christ.*

### **Luke 4:21-30**

Jesus began to speak in the synagogue at Nazareth: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

*Praise to you Lord Christ.*

### **A Reflection**

May only God's word be written – May only God's word be read – Amen.

It was interesting to read this week's Gospel, because the Lectionary does not always offer readings that are literally picking right up from the previous week. It makes it feel almost like we are watching a sort of mini-series – and we can pick up right where we left off last week!

As you may recall, in last week's "episode," we ended just as Jesus was saying to the people, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He is referring to the reading from Isaiah he had just offered in the Temple, sharing, "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." And he ends this passage by sharing with those in attendance, "today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He is it – the one the people have imagined and dreamed of for years.

We talked about his braveness, if not perhaps his audacity in offering these words, when for so many these words from Isaiah were in many ways the dream of the people of Israel. Israel was occupied, they were poor and oppressed, and my guess would have turned to this ideal offered by Isaiah for comfort in times of stress, taking comfort in the words that they would one day be free, they would one day no longer be poor. They would one day be no longer oppressed, and rather than feeling forgotten by the Lord, they would live for a year in the Lord's favor! And this one man, Jesus, was saying today's the day? Imagine believing in something your whole life and hearing those words "this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." What do you do? Do you believe it, even if it doesn't look like you imagined? Has the dream come true?

But as we join them this week, we find there are more words to be shared. The reaction of the people seemed initially favorable. "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth." The people responded, seeming awestruck in their recognition of

who this was that was speaking these words. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" sounding, perhaps, in my imagination, somewhat amazed and started by this unfolding of events. They have always known Jesus and now he says this?

But Jesus continues. He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' One suggested meaning of this proverb refers to the readiness and ability of doctors to heal sickness in others while sometimes not being able or willing to heal themselves. So maybe they believe Jesus should tend to his own problems before claiming he can heal others?"

Then he goes on to seemingly mock the group who had seemed so ready to support him initially saying, "Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." Is he inviting their challenges? Was this perhaps the nature of other challenges he had heard? "Do another miracle, and we will think about it!"

Then he dismisses the notion, offering, "Truly I tell you no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown." A seemingly bitter recognition of the ways of people!

Then he offers Scripture to challenge the ideas of the people. By recounting this story from 1 and 2 Kings, "But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." He is showing that foreigners, or Gentiles, often experienced God's aid when Israel did not.

The hostile reaction of the people is offered in describing "They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way." This anger in their response is something that commentary suggests is more in response to Jesus bringing God responding to Gentiles into Scripture than his claims to being Messiah.

So, basically this dream offered in Isaiah belonged to the people of Israel, the Jews, and not to the Gentiles. You have to belong to the tribe to get these benefits! The vision of Jesus goes perhaps beyond these boundaries of culture imposed by the people and not imposed by God.

And the anger of the people is not really effective, is it? "Filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way."

This description reminds me of something that is offered later in Luke, that is also offered in various versions in each of the Gospels – "If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." An important part of Jesus' message as he commissions and sends out the 12 – this is offered in Luke, Matthew, Mark and Acts, Jesus believes this because he had experienced it himself. These people in his hometown had not welcomed him, or his claim. But Jesus does not judge them. He passes through the midst of them and goes on his way.

There are some hard lessons here, but it strikes me that the most important part is this - Many recognize the Word of God – Many perhaps did even in Jesus' hometown, but it is equally important to know that these words are not for everyone. In the context of the time of the

Gospel, they were seeing the effects of the Roman Gods and other beliefs that traveled into Israel. In the context of our time, where we have the world at our fingertips and quick easy exposure to the ways of the rest of the world, we need to hold on to the fact that our way works for *us*, but may not be for everyone. Their ways are not wrong, they have just found their own path. We need to be able to walk with these other beliefs and other ways, not condemning them for being “wrong” but perhaps looking to see what can be shared. This is the world today – there is less of a need to be shaking the dust from our feet.

The joy of ecumenical services has been described to me in the past, and I have participated in a number ecumenical services – and each of them, seeing various faiths working together to celebrate God was a moment of delight. No dust to be shaken from any feet, just all of us celebrating God together in our own vision and way.

Let us find a way to share the word of the Lord without judgment – we can believe that Scripture we fulfilled in their hearing. And we can do this without assuming that we know best, but knowing that we have found a way that works for us, in our hearts and in our lives. We know that God can speak to the foreigner, and those who follow a different way, and we can still all meet at the table with love.

Amen.

Let us end by praying as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us. Pray this as you will, out loud or to yourself – just know that God hears you.

*Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.*

We will continue with the prayer of Spiritual Communion. This prayer was written by St. Alphonsus de Liguori. This prayer is now often used when the church is in a place of fasting from Communion, and I have heard this used in many of the on-line services being offered. We will be using this prayer in place of Communion as we work on regathering, too.

*Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love you above all things, and long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.*

Life is short,  
And we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with.

So be swift to love,  
Make haste to be kind,  
And go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In Christ,  
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