

The Fourth Sunday of Epiphany

February 3, 2013

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalm 71:1-6

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Visualize Jesus seated in the little synagogue of Nazareth. He is home, in the midst of men who have known him as a child, seen him grow up on the village streets, seen him at work helping his father Joseph, the village carpenter.

Now he's about thirty, a grown man, returned to the village after some time away. He's just read a passage from the prophet Isaiah, a passage of the hope of Israel and the presence of God leading His people from the despair of captivity to the joy of renewed life, all of which speaks of, or at least refers to, the age of the coming Messiah. It will be "the acceptable" day of the Lord.

They all know that; they all know the scriptures and prophecies; they have all longed for the day when it all will be true.

Jesus says, "Today this text is fulfilled in your very hearing." This is the day you have awaited for centuries.

Well, it doesn't look any different to them: no thunderclaps, rushing winds, blaring trumpets. This is, after all, just Joseph's son. Who does he think he is saying such a thing? Is he a false prophet? There are

plenty of those around. Is he one of those revolutionaries that they hear about, making trouble for all the decent, quiet people of Israel? Is he crazy?

Visualize turmoil in the synagogue. It's the turmoil we see on the news today, passionate emotional chaos over perceived blasphemies and insults to God. Visualize also Jesus sitting quietly in the midst of it all and finally saying, to those who can hear Him, "No doubt you will quote the proverb, physician heal thyself." Is there such a proverb? See if you can find it in Hebrew scripture. Jesus is being ironic. He is saying to those who have such a pretense of wisdom and tradition that they are far removed, estranged from the faith they profess, so far removed that they cannot see what is plainly there. They cannot believe, cannot accept, that the moment is at hand. God has acted.

Is Jesus surprised? I think not; I think he understands them very well. Centuries of disappointment have made them cynical about prophets and messiahs, particularly local prophets and messiahs. They demand more than words; they want proof. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark speak about miracles of Jesus done in Capernaum before his return to Nazareth; Luke assumes you know that. In Luke, Jesus already has celebrity. But the men of Nazareth haven't seen any miracles. Why should they believe it?

What is missing from it all? The answer is faith. Cynicism has eroded their faith to the point that they are no longer open to wonders, to miracles, open to the presence of God in their world; in their lives. The presence of the Messiah must be seen through the eyes of faith. The grace of God falls upon people of faith. It falls on a widow in Sidon, a gentile woman in a Phoenician city; she has faith. It falls upon Naaman, a Syrian general and a leper, who is cleansed because he has faith.

It falls on us in the midst of a world filled with tragedies and strife, but it does fall. It is so very easy to be caught up in issues and contentions

and to fail to feel and see that presence. Perhaps the best corrective for the stresses of our time is to see that figure of Jesus in the midst of it all quietly saying to each of us, "Today it is fulfilled in your hearing."

In His Holy Name.