

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Nehemiah 8:1-3,5-6,8-10; Psalm 19; I Corinthians 12:12-31; Luke 4:14-21

During this season of Epiphany, the baby who was born in the manger on Christmas comes to life for us.

In today's Gospel we see Jesus in a synagogue and it was his turn to read. Jesus turns to Isaiah, chapter 61, verse 2, a passage of hope and deliverance that reminded the Jews that God was indeed still with them, still caring for them.

Then Jesus hands the scroll back to the attendant to put away, returns to His seat, the eyes and the minds of everyone present follow Him, for they know that He will now explain the passage to them. Jesus sits, and He began to speak, and speak He does.

He begins his sermon with the most amazing sentence, He really grabs their attention by saying, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing". That is the entire sermon.

Jesus is dropping a bomb shell on this congregation. He is shaking them up. He is telling them that He is God's salvation in the world. Through Him, God's deliverance, God's promise of hope, God's promise of freedom, has come to His people. Jesus is revealing something about Himself, He is making clear His mission, His calling, His task as He goes about His ministry on this earth. Jesus is telling them that He is the Word of God incarnate in the world.

The best way to get a handle on this, is to first look at this passage as Isaiah said it to his people many years ago. The people were getting discouraged, they thought God had

abandoned them. Times were hard, food was scarce and hope for the future was in short supply. But Isaiah comes and says to all of this, “God is here, He will deliver, He will save, He will make you a mighty nation. Through you, God will keep his promise to bring salvation to the world”. This passage is one of hope, of freedom, of release, a passage of salvation.

Jesus was saying the same thing when He said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”. Jesus is saying to the people, and to us, that He is the one to bring God’s salvation to the world. He is God’s word incarnate in this world.

Jesus is putting God’s word of salvation into practice in our world, too. This is a passage of hope and salvation for us. Jesus is reminding us that no matter what we experience in this world, He is there for us. Jesus is God’s incarnate word in this world of brokenness. While we are standing on the Word of God, we will never be alone, because that Word of God is Jesus Christ in our world. When life gets tough, we need something more solid to cling to than feelings and emotions. In times of trial, we should rest on the Word of God, not on our feelings. We are to hear God’s word and carry His message of hope and grace into the world.

A closing story that says it well. It goes like this: A lady says: I am a mother of three and have recently completed my college degree. The last class I had to take was Sociology, and the last project of the term was called “Smile”. The class was asked to go out and smile at three people and document their reactions. I am a very friendly person and always smile at everyone and say hello anyway, so, I thought, this would be a piece of cake, literally.

Soon afterward, my family and I, went out to McDonald’s one cold March morning. We were standing in line, waiting to be

served, when all of a sudden everyone around us began to back away, and then even my husband did. I did not move an inch, an overwhelming feeling of panic welled up inside of me as I turned to see why they had moved. As I turned around I smelled a horrible “dirty body” smell, and there standing behind me were what I took to be two poor homeless men. As I looked down at the short gentleman, close to me, he was “smiling”. His beautiful sky blue eyes were full of God’s Light as he searched for acceptance. He said, “Good day” as he counted the few coins he had been clutching.

I held my tears as I stood there with them. The young lady at the counter asked him what they wanted. He said, “Coffee is all Miss”, because that was all they could afford. If they wanted to sit in the restaurant and warm up, they had to buy something.

He just wanted to be warm.

Then I really felt it, the compulsion was so great I almost reached out and embraced the little man with the blue eyes.

That is when I noticed all eyes in the restaurant were staring me, judging my every action. I smiled and asked the young lady behind the counter to give me two more breakfast meals on a separate tray. I then walked around the corner to the table that the men had chosen as a resting spot. I put the tray on the table and laid my hand on the blue eyed gentleman’s cold hand. He looked up at me, with tears in his eyes, and said, “Thank you”.

I leaned over, began to pat his hand and said, “It is not I who did this for you, God is here working through me to give you hope”.

I started to cry as I walked away to join my husband and son.

When I sat down my husband smiled at me and said, “That is why God gave you to me, Honey. To give me hope”. We held hands for a moment, and at that time we knew that only because of the Grace that we had been given, were we able to give. That

day showed me the pure Light of God's sweet love.

I returned to college, on the last evening of class, with this story in hand. I turned in "my project" and the instructor read it.

Then she looked up at me and said, "Can I share this"? I slowly nodded as she got the attention of the class. She began to read, and that is when I knew that we, as human beings and being part of God, share this need to heal people and be healed.

In my own way I had touched the people at McDonald's, my husband, my son, the instructor, and every soul that shared the classroom on that last night I spent as a college student. I graduated with one of the biggest lessons I would ever learn: UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE. End of story.

AMEN.