

Epiphany 3C 24/01/10

The ministry of Jesus was on a roll. After his baptism and time in the wilderness, he went forth to proclaim God's gospel of love. Following his preaching in Galilee, he entered his hometown. Although born in Bethlehem, his parents had fled to Egypt to protect their son from the wrath of King Herod. When Joseph heard of Herod's death, he brought his family back to live in Nazareth.

As a young boy, Jesus attended the synagogue with his father where he participated in community worship regularly. Attentively listening to the scriptures read from the Book of the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, he grew in knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Now the son of Joseph had returned, knowing that what he would say would not be received well.

As there were no permanent rabbis in the outlying villages, itinerant ones were always welcomed. When Jesus came to worship as was his custom, he was invited to read scripture and reflect on it. The scroll handed to him that day was from the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling it, he chose the place where it is written:

*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 favour.*— Luke 4:18-19

Wrapping the scroll up, he handed it to the attendant and said: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). His audience looked at him intently, amazed by his words. Then he dropped a bombshell, telling them that God loved all people, Gentiles and Jews. Infuriated, they turned on him. The son of Joseph dared tell them that God's love was for all people. "How dare he? He's one of us. We are God's people, the chosen ones." They demanded Jesus give them a sign of his authority, but Jesus refused. He could do no miracles there because these people lacked faith. Jesus had not come to his hometown to put on a show.

Rage took them over, and the mob drove him out of town to kill him. But Jesus walked right through them, a prophet not accepted in his own hometown. The people he once knew best lacked love, and they had just rejected the Son of God's love. Jesus left Nazareth and never returned.

The gospel of love was first preached to Jesus' own countrymen. When it was rejected, it was presented to others. Miracles were done where faith existed. His words were received by those with open hearts. God's love was demonstrated in word and confirmed with action. With Jesus' death, God's love confirmed that love.

"God is love." In the words of 1 John chapter 4 we hear these words confirmed. *Dear friends, we should love each other, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has become God's child and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love to us: He sent his one and only Son into the world so that we could have life*

*through him. This is what real love is: It is not our love for God; it is God's love for us. He sent his Son to die in our place to take away our sins. - 1 John 4:7-10*

“God is love.” When John defined God as love, he was not just describing a characteristic or an attribute of God. If he were, he would have said, “God is a loving person.” He didn’t say that. Through prayer and faith, we come to understand just what he says: “God is love!” That is, God’s very life empowers us to love. God is love, a love revealed in Jesus.

For love is not static. Love is not a warm, fuzzy feeling, here some days and vanishing on others. Love is action. Love is what you choose to do.

A priest was sharing his thoughts about love with a young couple preparing for marriage. He told them that to love — really love — was to reach out to another with only the desire to care, share, comfort, encourage, or give hope. These words brought tears to the eyes of the young woman. “You know, Father, not everyone is loving if that is what it means to love. My parents are loving people. They made sure that I made it to Sunday school and worship. Faith and the church were very important to our family. “After I left home, my brother, Jimmy, was born. He was a change-of-life baby and was physically and somewhat mentally impaired. It was hard on my parents. They loved Jimmy so much. They wanted him to know God loved him, too. Every Sunday they took him to church until gossiping parishioners continued to murmur ‘Jimmy is very disruptive in church. Wouldn’t it be better for everyone if Jimmy stayed home on Sunday mornings?’

Jimmy was being rejected because he just didn’t fit in. After that my parents stopped going to church- there was nothing the priest could do. Several years later a new priest was looking over the parish roll, he noticed that my parents were faithful in sending in their offerings, but they never came to Mass or participated in any congregational events. Asking the church secretary what the story was he learned all about Jimmy.

“Later that week the priest visited our home After talking for some time with my parents, he invited them to come to Mass on Sunday.“ ‘Well, it’s sort of hard, Father, with Jimmy. It’s just a difficult situation,’ my mother replied. The priest would accept no excuse. ‘God loves you and your son. I’ve come to make sure you understand that and to ask you to come to church this Sunday, and to bring Jimmy, of course.’

“ ‘We’ll see,’ was Mum’s hesitant response. Sunday came, but neither Jimmy nor my parents turned up.”

Rejection — it’s so hard to deal with, especially when it’s done by people who espouse faith. Jesus was rejected because he *didn’t fit* the role of the expected Messiah. The words he spoke comforted some, but confronted others, those who refused to reach out and show love to others.

Love is the action of reaching out to others — Love — God is love; a love revealed to us in Jesus. Jesus walked into his hometown and was rejected

because he was different — he didn't fit in.

When the priest visited that first time, he put his love into action, but there was no response to his invitation to come to Mass. Jimmy's parents hadn't rejected his overtures; they did not know how they would be received. They didn't want Jimmy to be rejected again. I am not asking us to beat ourselves up about this story but it is surprising how common stories of this nature are. God is love, a love revealed to us in Jesus. Love is when we receive God's love and put it into action. Think about it. It's time to remove that prejudiced "R" word, rejection, and replace it with a better one, the "R" word, receive. It really will make a difference in your life and in the lives of others. Think about it as we celebrate the divine mysteries this morning and learn from our Lord. Amen