

Sermon for 30 January 2022 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Scriptures: Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalter 794 (*Verses 1-6 only*) Psalm 71; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30

“Knowing”

My heart is full. I want to get an idea across today that is so powerful that I hardly trust it.

First, I want you to pray with me, saying **Lord, hear our prayer.**

Here goes:

O Healer of Galilee,

you are afflicted in the sufferings of your people
and are full of compassion and tender mercy.

Hear us as we pray for those who suffer:

Lord, hear our prayer.

For all who suffer in body or mind...**R**

For those whose livelihood is insecure,
the overworked, the hungry, the homeless and the destitute,

For those who have been downtrodden, ruined, and driven to despair...**R**

For little children, whose surroundings hide them from your love and beauty,

For all the fatherless and motherless...**R**

For those who have to bear their burdens alone, and for all who have lost
those they love...**R**

For those who are in doubt and anguish of soul, for those who are
oversensitive and afraid...**R**

For those who suffer through their own wrongdoing...**R**

For those whose suffering is unrelieved by the knowledge of your love...**R**

Set free, Helper of the weak, the souls of your servants from all restlessness
and anxiety.

Give us the peace and power that flow from you.

Keep us in all perplexities and distresses, in all griefs and grievances,
from any fear or faithlessness,

that, being upheld by your strength and stayed on the rock of your
faithfulness,

through storm and stress we may abide in you...**Amen.**

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Thank you.

There is a dark side to the Epiphany. We see it in Luke's description of the people's reaction to Jesus after he read from the Book of Isaiah and sat down.

By the time the scene ended, they were trying to kill him!

I've pondered and prayed over this all week. Why? Why is it "coming home" so powerfully this time? I've heard it all my life, and read it every three years since we started using the lectionary 50-odd years ago.

Have you listened to the generals this week?

Talked to anybody in Baltimore's Little Italy lately?

Are you joining Lori in our church's collection today for the firefighters on Stricker Street and their families?

The Bible is just too darned relevant!

Who are the world's most persecuted people?

Open your Bible ... You'll find Jews and then Christians right there in the thick of the trouble, over and over ...

It's enough to make you angry ...

... and that makes one look for a scapegoat.

That's why I had us start with a prayer, put out years ago by the United Methodist Publishing House in its Book of Worship.

We prayed for help for all kinds of people in all sorts of difficulty. We begged God to do something healing in case after case. We acted like we had some influence ... and as though the power we appealed to listened.

Folks, the trouble with us is our wiring. We can't solve everything, but we're connected. We know there's power. We may hang back, but we've been accepted. We know something about love, on both sides, both giving and receiving; and when someone makes us mad, or fills us with despair, first thing we want to do is hit back, blame somebody ...

...but that's exactly what love fails at. Love forever sees itself as part of the problem ... and because that's what love does, it looks for ways to be part of the solution.

We're not a big social institution these days in this country. We're a fellowship, all right ... but unless we're 'way off track, we are in touch with the bad as well as the good, because that's the nature of loving; that's the power we keep receiving, and sometimes feeling, and connecting with others about, and working on. That's our purpose. We know that much in our

bones. It means we ask for help. It means we keep imagining things. It's exciting. It's work. It keeps us alive.

That's why the synagogue @ Nazareth got so mad @ Jesus. They knew they were part of the story. They weren't just there to receive. They were part of the problem, and that meant they were part of the solution. Knowing is the rest of the play. Act One is just Act One. You don't even finish hearing about the solution before you know you're part of the problem.

Take it to heart. I'm trying, and in God's wisdom I see you doing the same.

Amen.