

Sermon for 19 January 2025 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Second Sunday after the Epiphany/Human Relations Day

Scriptures: Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalter: Page 771 Psalm 36 :5-10 (*Response : Page 73, last line only : Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer and Friend.*); 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

Sermon

As we continue the Christian season of Epiphany, or announcing, we see how the Hebrew prophet Isaiah's assurance that God will not stop the people of Israel's progress in right living and faithful living played out in their own worship and action. Our first lesson says they believe they won't just eventually return to their homeland and rebuild their temple in Jerusalem. God will make an example of them, for all people, of loyalty and faithfulness; kings will come to learn and worship God's ways of governing and living together from them.

Likewise, the psalm makes sure we remember that it's not Israel on its own, but God's loving attachment to them, that is the lesson for all humankind to see. "How precious is your love, O God! All may take refuge in the shadow of your wings!"

Then we begin a weekly study of Paul's First Letter to the church at Corinth, and study today some of the good and bad sides of church life that he dealt with ... again on the theme that human response is the second stage of growth for all of us in faith. In our case, it was God's demonstration of love in Jesus that got us started: the Jewish son of Israel through whom God reaches out still, beyond the good news of this story of growth and expansion farther and farther across the face of the earth.

Then we come to the Gospel of John, and Jesus the grown man, at a wedding at Cana, turning a feast into a miracle tale and the beginning of his adult career of love and example.

John wastes no time with birth and boyhood tales. Like the Gospel of Mark, John gives us a mature, confident adult to listen to and follow, right from the start.

This is good. As a community, we Jews and Christians have learned to tell stories and sing psalms and follow customs and have special days that remind us what we human beings are about. We spend time regularly learning and applying what God stands for and how to honor and apply that. From the 18th to the 25th of January, in what we Roman Catholics and Protestants call the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we pay special attention to our behavior with each other, and to the outreach we are called to make in all sorts of ways to improve conditions among our neighbors all over the world. Then specifically, Americans decided some time ago to join in a Human Relations Day that goes as far as the imagination every year to shake loose every kind of unfairness, and abuse, and just flat inequality right where we are and for as far as we can reach to see and to wipe away.

Let's count a few things along these lines right now. We've got a temporary cease fire of the worst kind of ugliness in Israel and Gaza. Let us pray, and ask forgiveness, and beg for better behavior all over the world about that blemish on godliness.

Then we're just now beginning to move past one of the worst sides of social cruelty, right here in America. Let us pray for the will to overrule racism in all of our minds and actions, our customs and our shame. This is our call, this surely is part of what we're put here for, this year, now. Let us use some of the words our United Methodist Church has made solid effort to provide us.

Finally, we've got a Presidential inauguration to produce, and an administration to work out wholesomely and constructively over the next four years. Be with us, Lord. Be everywhere at once, and teach us how to produce well and widely, for all the world's sake.

Now, let us thank you, Lord, for the practical, truth-seeking effort we have made this Sunday, at the beginning of this New Year, to apply your truth. We turn to you, and open our hearts and our wills to your invitation this day, to be like Jesus, who worked miracles with what you gave him, to increase love among humankind, and to do it with what we have at hand, in his name we pray.

Amen.