

Grace and peace are yours dear friends from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen

The season of Epiphany continues and each gospel text in Epiphany is about the Light of Christ being revealed to the world. This is what the word Epiphany means. Christ was first revealed as King of the Jews to the wise men, then again at the Baptism of our Lord, again when Jesus turned water into wine, and again last week when He declared the Year of the Lord's favor to none other than the very people of His hometown.

Great joy, happiness, gratitude, and hope are also recorded in the Epiphany narratives. The revelation of our Lord's presence 'among us' brings the understanding of God's love 'for us'. We see the prophecy being fulfilled, the hope of the world to come, and the restoration of a Kingdom to its former glory, power, and strength.

The texts of Holy Scripture today are a beautiful alignment, connection, and reality of God's work in [both] the world and the individuals. It is the revelation that God is caring for us in ways that we cannot fully understand. It is the call to love one another and trust in the Lord. It is the means for, Great Expectations on our part.

God knows us before we are born, provides us our strength from the time of conception, and tells us that all the gifts of the Spirit (faith, speaking in tongues, prophecy, understanding and wisdom, even extreme charity) are nothing in the sight of God... if love is not present. The passage of Paul's letter to the Corinthians is two fold my friends; it is a message and revelation to us with regard to tending and caring for each other; it is also the reality of God's love for us! God's love for you, me, and all human life, is a love that is patient, enduring, and everlasting; a love to be modeled by each of us in our lives.

Love is at the heart of God and love is within the Light and Life of Christ. Without love, there is no life, no hope, and no restoration. Without love, no Kingdom that will stand before God. Our gospel text places all the other Scripture readings in context when 'love' is removed from the equation.

As our gospel ended last week, Jesus proclaimed the Year of the Lord's favor and the fulfillment of the prophetic words of Isaiah. All who were present in the synagogue were amazed and filled with great expectations of what this could possibly mean for them. A hometown hero comes to save the day, the lifestyle, and the future of all the people that participated in his growth, education, and family life. This is, "Joseph's son", the boy whom they guided, instructed, taught, and lived next to for many years. This is the truth of 'life' in the context of any hometown where 'everyone knows your name'.

Jesus knows the great expectations the people have in their hearts, which are filled NOT with love, but rather, self-interest. Before they have a chance to defile themselves with words from their mouth, Jesus speaks to what is in their hearts and minds; "Doctor, cure yourself." "Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." Then, Jesus speaks the truth that God did not send Him to Nazareth to perform miracles among them. At this point, great expectations become even greater disappointment!

There is no love in the hearts of the people of Nazareth towards their hometown hero (now nemesis) and they take action. Without love, the rage in their hearts take over and they attempt to destroy the very person God has anointed to redeem humankind! With true mob-mentality, momentum, and might, they lead Jesus to the highest point in the town with the intent of pushing Him over a cliff.

Before we hear the ‘rest of the story’ within the gospel text; reflect back upon Jeremiah’s text.

“But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’” (Do not say, “Is this not Joseph’s son?)

“For you shall go to all to whom I send you.” (Jesus went where He was sent)

“And you shall speak whatever I command you.” (Jesus is the Word of God)

“Do not be afraid of them.” (Jesus moves as the crowds direct Him)

“For I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.”

“They lead Jesus to the highest point in the town with the intent of pushing Him over the cliff. But He passed through the midst of them and went on His way.”

There is an important, harsh, and pure truth for us today in these Scripture texts my friends. Epiphany is the Light of Christ being revealed to the world. When the Light of Christ is revealed to us today, even in the stranger, do we welcome the stranger because of what they can do for us? Or for what we can do together in the name of Christ our Lord? Is it possible that our great expectations of God today can also become great disappointment?

My very dear friends in Christ, the truth is; it is not about us. God has already secured our salvation, provided for our every need, and granted us the faith to live a life in service and trust. Last week our epistle shared the message of the Gifts of the Spirit and aligned them to the One Body of Christ we all belong to. We are all important and each provide value and unique functions; a heart, a hand, wisdom, sight, hearing, and every other function the Body of Christ requires to care for the world.

It is not about us individually, even though we are both important and essential to the work in the Kingdom. It is about love! Put another way, it is all about our ability to be compassionate towards one another in the way we speak, act, approach, tend, and care for all that God has created. It is about compassion that is so complete, that when disappointment is encountered, we will be patient, kind, understanding, and enduring; instead of destructive.

Where is the love in the gospel text? The greatest love today is revealed [again] in the actions of Jesus in that He departs from the people of Nazareth in peace. Jesus is understanding, kind, patient, and His love endures for them. Destruction of them is not in His heart, mind, or actions. The people of Nazareth gather together and attempt to destroy; we gather together and lift one another up in the name of Christ.

This my friends is how we come together to build-up the Kingdom of God at the direction, design, and decree of the Holy Spirit. We do it with the love in our hearts that has compassion for one another, patience and understanding for the neighbor, love and care for the strangers we encounter. And we live each day by the grace of God to serve as we are called.

God has great expectations of us and will not be disappointed because He has provided all we need, require, and, desire to be successful in His Kingdom. Love and compassion not only matter; they are essential to experience the peace that passes all understanding that keeps our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.