

3rd Epiphany Year C
January 23, 2022
CCM

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen

Do you remember Paul Harvey? He, of course, was the radio broadcaster well known for his "The Rest of the Story" segments listened to by more than 24 million people per week from about 1951 to 2008. He died in February of 2009.

I came across a collection of his favorite stories this week. And this one particularly caught my attention:

It seems that a man named Carl Coleman was on his way to work one morning when he was hit from behind by another motorist. Both cars stopped and both motorists got out to survey the damage. The other driver was quite distraught. The accident was her fault, she admitted, and the car she was driving was new, less than two days out of the showroom. She told Carl Coleman that she dreaded telling her spouse. Mr. Coleman was sympathetic, but he still had to pursue the exchange of licenses, registrations, and insurance cards.

The woman reached into the glove compartment to retrieve these documents, neatly placed in an envelope by her spouse. On the first piece of paper that she pulled out of the envelope was a hand written note. The note read, "In case of accident, remember, it's you I love, not the car." The note was signed by her husband.

No, this homily is not about wondering whether you have chosen the right person to marry or not.

But it is about raising questions about the way we see and understand. It is about wondering whether we at times think we see and understand a situation, or an event, or another person...when we, in fact, do not understand at all.

In this morning's lesson from Saint Luke's Gospel, we find Jesus at home in Nazareth attending service at his home synagogue. Gathered around him are the people who he has known all his life - school mates.. fellow apprentices...aunts and uncles...the family that lived across the street...the mayor...the owner of the village store. They had heard rumors and reports, but what happens in that gathering is about to truly blow their minds.

It was the tradition in the local synagogue to call upon one of the men present (such were those patriarchal times) to read from the scrolls of the Law and from the Prophets and then expound upon them. It is not surprising that the leader of the synagogue turns to this local boy who apparently is now making a name for himself. Jesus chooses to read from the scroll of Isaiah. And when he has finished, he sits down and says:

" TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE HAS BEEN FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING."

TODAY.

Wait. What? Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled? In this guy? I mean, we know him! This is Joseph and Mary's boy! We remember when he spilled varnish all over the cabinet his father was building! He's the one who used to walk all around the village talking to himself! And didn't he play shortstop for the Nazareth Allstars back in '14?

They say that familiarity breeds contempt. All those recollections...all those memories that lead now to preconceived notions...have dulled their senses and blinded their sight when it comes to new possibilities. They see Jesus...but they cannot see God's Son. They hear promises being fulfilled...but are deaf to what that really means. And you and I, with the gift of divine hindsight, read this story and think to ourselves, 'What a shame!'

But let me ask you a question, or several questions, this morning. Who do you see when you look at Jesus? And what do you hear when he declares, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing?"

Is he a character at the heart of one of the greatest morality plays the world has ever known?

Is he a wise teacher and gifted healer?

Is he a shaman of some kind?

Is he a mythical being, meant to point humankind in the right direction?

Is he the reason for long held family tradition that involved Sunday mornings and other special times of the year?

Or is he the one that God has sent into the world, anointed to bring good news to the poor? Was he sent by God to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight for the blind? In his life, in his death, and ultimately in his resurrection, has he set the oppressed free and has he proclaimed the year of the Lord's favor?

Finally, do we think he was...is...the Son of God? Not just a child of God, but God made flesh who then came and lived amongst us?

I know. These are not easy questions to answer. I wrestle with them every single day. You see there are so many ways to look at Jesus. There are lots of ways to acknowledge Jesus without really having to do much about him. Or there are those perspectives that lead us to truly believe the words spoken in the synagogue at Nazareth two thousand years ago: Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. And if that is true, what does that mean...for you...for me...for the way we choose to live our lives...and for the world in which we live?

TODAY. What is our response? And if it is to believe that Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled, how will we be transformed by that response? In the coming week, will we seek:

To make every stranger that we meet glad that they have met us?

Bring peace to every gathering and meeting we attend?

Will we look for God in the faces of those we meet?

Will we strive for justice among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?

And if we don't do all of these things perfectly, will we remember that "it is you that God loves, not perfection? That is why God has sent His Son."

Amen.