

EPIPHANY: A TIME TO CELEBRATE GOD'S GIFT FOR ALL PEOPLE

Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany February 20, 2011

Psalm 119:33-40

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18

1Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

Matthew 5:38-48

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF

When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment he said we were first to love God with our whole being and secondly to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. It's this second commandment that gives us all the trouble. Loving one's neighbor must be done in actions taken on their behalf. We are used to thinking of love in terms of an emotional response, but the Bible calls for tangible responses to our neighbors' needs.

As Christians we like to pull away from the Law and be led by the Spirit in all of our dealings, but I believe there is something else at play here. Though our salvation comes to us by grace through faith and not because of anything we do, still what we do matters. If we say we love God, but fail to show kindness to those created in his image, we are only deceiving ourselves.

Before Christ entered our lives we were dead in our sins. Even now Paul reminds us in Romans 7 that there is a war going on inside of us; we often do what we know we shouldn't and fail to do what we should. As children of the kingdom of heaven we need to learn how a child of God should act. So rather than seeing these verses as a set of rules that no longer apply because we are saved by faith and not works, let us rather see them as part of a road map that is there to teach us in a very tangible way what love for our neighbor looks like.

If we are baptized into the kingdom we need to learn the virtues of the kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul tells us that what is important is faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love. As followers of Christ Jesus, let us learn to lay down our lives in love for all those the providence of God has placed around us, and let us learn to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

This week's Reflection was prepared by the Rev. David Haberer, pastor of Church of All Nations, which reaches out to the world from the heart of New York City. Visit www.CFAN.net to learn more about this ministry. Pastor Haberer is an ordained minister with the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Afghanistan – with thanks to God for the recently translated Dari Bible; and with prayers that this translation is well accepted and reaches those who need it most; pray for open doors and

for opportunities for people to receive the Bible, and for God's protection over the Christian community who are often persecuted for their faith; **Pakistan** – with thanks to God for the completion of the Urdu Study Bible; and with prayers that it will be a golden gift that brings Urdu-speakers fresh understanding and many blessings; pray that God will bring peace and open new doors for the Bible in light of Terrorist activities that continue to devastate the country and make Bible distribution very difficult; also pray for the economic situation, where rampant inflation is making life difficult for ordinary people; **Iran** – with thanks to God for the distribution of 100,000 Scriptures to Persian Christians and non-Christians around the world, and for our partners who carry out this work; and with prayers for God's protection on them and those who receive the Scriptures, for more opportunities to distribute God's Word, and that the newly published Children's Bibles will bring many young people to Christ; also pray for funding and for the great work being done in this Muslim-majority county.

Activity Corner: "Give It Away"

Supplies Needed: Bible; Song – "Magic Penny" by Malvina Reynolds, Chart, and marker

Lead group members in singing the song, "Magic Penny," then engage the group in a discussion on what it means to give love away. Read Matthew 5:43-45 and John 3:16 aloud, and point out that love must be demonstrated. For example, we must pray for our persecutors. Highlight the fact that God showed his love for us by sending his only Son to die for the sins of humanity. Then, instruct the students to write down one way they can show love to those outside of their circle of friends. Examples include: sharing lunch with a student who has none; giving your time to serve in a soup kitchen; visit the sick in the hospital. Invite them to write their ideas on the chart provided.