

EPIPHANY: A TIME TO PROCLAIM GOD'S LOVE FOR ALL PEOPLE

February 5, 2012

Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Isaiah 40:21-31

Psalm 147:1-11, 20c

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Mark 1:29-39

Because they knew who he was...

The week's Gospel reading opens with Jesus visiting Simon's house after leaving the Temple. Hearing that Simon's mother-in-law is ill, he heals her and later began healing the crowds of people who besieged him. Many of the sick had demons, but as he cast them out, he forbade the demons to say anything, "because they knew who he was." The next morning as his disciples sought him, we are told that they found him in "a lonely place" praying. Then, out of love, Jesus decides to take his healings beyond the parochial into the universal (Mark 1:35-39).

We, too, who have come face to face with Jesus through salvation, know who he is. And by knowing, like the apostle Paul, we feel compelled to share the Gospel, the gift that God has given us through Christ.

In this week's reading from 1 Corinthians, Paul indicates that he is more than aware of his gift for proclaiming the Good News, and so he *must* proclaim it. As an educated Roman citizen, he could have had a comfortable life in Tarsus as Saul the tentmaker and Pharisee. Instead, he gives up a comfortable life to become an itinerant preacher, living only on what his audiences give to him freely out of love. It is Paul's joy and his responsibility to use his education to adapt the message of the Gospel with integrity so that his audiences can understand.

It is because we know "who Jesus is" that we can say with Paul, "I reckon everything as loss for the sake of what is so much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8b, *GNT*). What a gift!

It has happened to all of us at one time or another. We have all received a gift that was something we really did not want, or really did not like, or was just simply not appropriate. What grandparent has not received an inexpensive gift from a doting grandchild? The child is not yet able to discern the grandparent's preferences, but gives the gift out of a heart of love, and because it is affordable. Although the grandparent may not really care for the gift itself, he or she keeps it and uses it knowing that the gift was given out of love.

Unlike the gift of the undiscerning grandchild, God's gifts to us are never inappropriate. They are given out of love and are to be used responsibly in love. But just recognizing and using our gifts is not enough either. We need to discern *how* to use them. When we use the gifts that God has given us, we do not seek anything in return; we do not boast about our abilities, no matter how unique they may be. But we thank God wholeheartedly for entrusting us with his Spirit, so we, too, can carry out the work of Jesus, and bring others to "know who he is."

It's an awesome responsibility but one that causes us to exclaim joyfully: "Let us thank God for his priceless gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15, *GNT*)

This week's Reflection was prepared by James Harvey, MA, a graduate of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL who serves on the Global Scripture Ministries staff of American Bible Society.

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This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: New Zealand: with thanks to God that this year the Society will provide Bibles for use during Religious Education classes in elementary schools. This means that 32,500 children will have Bibles to use during these lessons. Many of them will not have used a Bible before; and with prayers for God to bless this program; also pray that the reformatted New Zealand Maori Bible is widely accepted and used, and for creative projects to engage younger people in the Bible Society's mission; **South Pacific** – with thanks to God for opportunities to share God's Word and for the annual Bible Week activities at the end of June, which challenge people to read, respect, and follow the Bible; and with prayers for the celebrations this year, which include Bible reading marathons, youth rallies, Bible quizzes, Bible studies radio broadcasts, and promotional visits to churches; also pray for the impact of Bible Week across the islands that the Society serves, that young people will embrace the Gospel and become godly leaders and parents of tomorrow; **Papua New Guinea** – with thanks to God for the exciting expansion of the literacy project with prisoners, as several former prisoners have returned home and have started Bible-based literacy programs, while other prisoners are translating Bible stories into their indigenous languages for use in churches and primary schools; and with prayers for the continued success of these programs as there are 840 languages in this region, and reading materials are scarce.

Activity Corner: "God's Kindness" Montage

Supplies needed: Bible; poster board; old magazines; scissors; glue or paste; marker. Read together Psalm 147 and discuss God's kindness as described by the psalm writer. Across the top of the poster board write, "God Is Kind." Look through old magazines for pictures that depict God's kindness and pictures of people being kind to others and create a montage on poster board. Display the poster board where you gather for family devotions and use the images in the montage as prompts for prayers of thanksgiving and praise. Conclude by singing "How Great Thou Art," or one of your favorite praise hymns.