

God's Word is For You! 1-24-16

Lord Jesus, we come b/4 You, thankful for Your Word, thankful that You came, You suffered, You died & rose again, conquering death. We long for the day when we will see You face to face. Help us to live out our days faithfully. A

Today is the 3rd Sunday of Epiphany. Our Bishop, in his article in the Jan. Newsletter says, "The word *Epiphany* means manifestation. To make manifest is to make evident, to show plainly. It's a transition in which the obscure becomes clear, the unknown becomes known, the hidden becomes exposed, the closed becomes open, the covered revealed, the private becomes public & the invisible becomes visible. The season of manifestation is time to celebrate the ways in which Jesus manifests His identity as Savior, Redeemer, Lord & God in person." The hope is during this time we'd see Jesus more clearly – through reading the Word, through preaching, & through the sacraments. This is not about knowing the stories, though that's a good thing. It's not about the facts – though that doesn't hurt. It's about Jesus revealing Himself up-close & personal – that you would know that His Word is for you, He is for you.

In our first reading today, Ezra, the priest, was told to bring the book of the Law of Moses to the square before the Watergate. There he stood, as did the people, & he read from the book from early morning until midday. The people were so touched by the Word they worshipped the Lord; they wept. They had to be told not to cry –

rejoice! You see, the people had not heard the Word for many years –not since before captivity. They were the remnant who had made it back to the great city – Jerusalem! While cleaning the temple, they had found the Book of the Law of Moses. Hearing those words read, was a blessing. They heard the story of creation, of Noah, of Abraham, Jacob, Esau, Joseph & Moses. & then the reading of the law. It may have been to them like Christmas Eve is to us, when we hear the words “A decree went out from Caesar Augustus...” or Easter, “the tomb is empty, He is not here...” or “For God so loved the world...” or any scripture that is music to your ears.

Unfortunately, we take the Word of God for granted. We have bibles galore! And standing half the day to hear it read??? How many of us would show up? I am afraid we are guilty of underestimating the power of God’s Word. You may not be in the habit of taking God’s Word “for you!” There are many places in Scripture where its value is expressed. 2Tim.3: “**16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” That’s similar to what David said in Ps.19 – the law of the Lord is perfect – it revives the soul, makes the simple wise, the heart glad. It enlightens the eyes – it helps us discern our errors. We are to desire it more than gold. It is sweeter than honey! Isaiah says, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever!” If the day ever comes when we will be forced to give up our Bibles, we will be one sorry lot – “Why

didn't I read it when I had the chance? Why didn't I at least try to memorize some of it? ?? It's kind of ironic, isn't it, that the day would ever come when Bibles would be taken away – people say so many negative things about it – it was written by men, it contradicts itself, it's outdated,... If it is so useless, why the fear of having them in the hands of the people? Why? Because it is a powerful book! God reveals Himself through it! It revives the soul! It makes the heart glad!

Jesus had been traveling throughout Galilee – teaching in the synagogues & well received. However, in Nazareth, His hometown, it's a different story. He's given a copy of Isaiah. He begins to read ““The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives & recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” Apparently, Jesus could not do miracles in his hometown. He said the passage had been fulfilled in their hearing, but there'd be no blind receiving their sight, etc. Jesus says in other parts of the Bible that nothing miraculous happens because of unbelief. At first the people are receptive to Him, but then they start to discredit Him – “isn't this Joseph's son?” Like, “we know Him. We saw Him grow up.” Jesus accepts the fact that a prophet is not accepted in his hometown. But Jesus goes on to say, Elijah & Elisha both did miracles outside of Israel – in other words, salvation is open to the Gentiles!

The people were incensed! Why? They liked their religion. They could fulfill the obligations of the law w/o a heart change. They are so angry they want to throw Jesus over the cliff! That's pretty angry! Jesus had touched a nerve! Was it too threatening to have the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy right there b/4 their eyes? Or was it about God's grace being extended to the Gentiles? In any case, Jesus exposed their hearts.

The point is, as Hebrews 4 puts it, **“12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” God's Word is living & active! It's alive! It convinces us of God's love for us! It convicts us of sin! It shows us our true motivation – intentions of our hearts. It comforts us when we go through hard times. It tells us what to expect as we live out our Christian lives.

I'm certain you could share times God has met you in the Word as you have cried out to Him in times of need. If I were better at journaling, I could share many times the Lord has spoken directly to me through His Word – assuring me that His Word is for me. I will tell you about a few. After spending a night crying about our daughter who was living in rebellion, I “just happened to open my Bible” to Jeremiah 31. Underlined in red were verses 16-17 “Thus says the Lord: “Keep your voice from weeping, & your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the Lord, & they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your

future, declares the Lord, & your children shall come back to their own country.”

You can understand why it was very comforting to me. It was God’s Word for me!

And our daughter did come back.

My faith for healing has increased as I remember Psalm 34:19 “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” ALL! Mind you – ALL! And Psalms 103:1-3, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases!” There’s that word ALL again! It is a source of great comfort to refer to these scriptures. It’s not up to me to believe REALLY hard – I just quote the Word & rest!

Many years ago I woke up and told Ed, “I had the strangest dream. This man who had spoken at our church was being kind of flirtatious. I kept saying to him, ‘I am betrothed! I am betrothed!’ Now, I’d never say that – I’d say “I am married! Bug off!” The next day I was late getting out the door, so I grabbed my Bible and said, “Lord, give me something quick!” I opened to Hosea 2:19 “I will betroth you to Me forever. I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness & you shall know the Lord.” Those words were sweeter than honey!

(I’ve asked W. if he’s ok w/me saying this.) A couple weeks back, the OT lesson

was from Zephaniah. As D. read verse 17, I thought “that is a verse for W.” Since that time, I’ve seen the verse in several places – most recently in the NALC Newsletter. It is in a rather large box w/a pic of a boy peacefully nestled in to his father’s shoulder. The verse is “The Lord your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.” Is that God’s Word to W. & D.? It may or may not speak to them – God may speak other words to them. Those words speak powerfully to me – is it God’s Word to me as I pray for W. & D.? Definitely! God’s Word builds faith in us – assuring us of His love & care.

God’s Word is holy. It is to be read, chewed on, digested. God’s Word is true whether people believe it or not. The NALC came in to being because we believe there are those who misuse scripture. But we are not to stop there. We are to all the more read it, study it, have it become a part of us. Do you wonder why it is so difficult to get to reading it? There’s a war against us reading it! It’s powerful! “Listen! Listen, God is calling through the Word inviting, offering forgiveness, comfort and joy!” Amen.