

January 10 2016 Year C First Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 29

Isaiah 43:1-7

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22, p. 937

Sermon *The God With Skin On*

Three year old Sarah's room was just down from the upstairs bedroom from her parent's room and normally she usually was a sound sleeper. But every once in a while her mother and father were summoned to her room by quiet whimpering and tears because of bad dreams or by fear of the dark. This time Sarah's father was awoken by violent screaming and loud crying coming from her room so he leaped from his bed and ran down the hall way and found Sarah sitting up in her bed clutching her teddy bear and sobbing great tears. Sitting down at the edge of the bed, Sarah's father gathered her up in his arms and quietly asked her. "What in the world is wrong?" Sobbing she told him about the terrible nightmare that she had and experienced and how hard it was for her to be all alone in her bedroom. And the comforting tones her father reassured her by saying she shouldn't ever be afraid because God loves her and was always with her. Sarah thought about it for a minute and then she gave a surprising reply, "You know how I love God but when I am afraid I want a God with skin on just like you Daddy."

You know we adults have a lot more in common than we think with little Sarah. We are imperfect and we are often insecure but nevertheless each day of our lives we are called upon to face our fears, our doubts, our failures and our mistakes as in the midst of the dark of the night we face the reality of what it means to be human. We look for comfort, and we look for answers but to whom do we turn for comfort? And which answers are the right ones? Both Sarah and her father had their own ideas about where to go. The darkness seems to over whelm us and we have no place else in the world to turn. Sarah's father who was not afraid at the time sort of stood back rashly and objectively takes look. A person of faith in a crisis wants a powerful, all knowing and all loving God. Of course he is with us. God will walk with us when the chips are down But what did Sarah have to say? In the midst of crisis, her perspective was a lot different. She was not concerned about listing the divine attributes of God; so much as she wanted someone to wrap arms around her, to keep her warm when she was cold and when she was afraid; so which one of them was right.

If we look at our passage from Luke's Gospel this morning that both in a sense are correct. Both objectives are needed if we are to have a true picture of what

God has done in his son Jesus especially during this season of Epiphany. Human beings like Sarah and her father have, I think, had at least basic two spiritual needs.

First of all we need to know that there is somebody up there and that there is somebody that is all knowing, all loving, just, merciful perfect, holy, eternal being that is in control of our often chaotic world- chaotic universe. We need to know that God is divine; we need to know in theological terms that God is transcendent.

Secondly though we need to know that God, using Sarah's words, that God is somebody with skin on; a being not fully other and is able to identified with each one of us and our places in life and understand where we are coming from and who we are as regular human beings. We need to know that somebody out there understand us, somebody who loves us, somebody that cares about us and takes a personal interest in us as individuals. In short we, also, need to know that God also in another theological term that God is immanent, God as a perspective on life as we know it and this is what the writer of the Gospel of Matthew is saying the birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecy found in Isaiah. "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called Emanuel which means God with us". And this was also what the writer of Luke was getting at when he described Jesus 'baptism, God's important words, "You are my Son". Thus we are able to know and able to see what God is like because he came to us in Jesus. No longer do we have to wonder of question what God is like because in the birth and the baptism of Jesus we have a true revelation of whom God is and what God expects of each one of us as followers of Jesus.

God with us then means first of all another theological word incarnation, literally translated means in the flesh; the celebration of Epiphany then means the acknowledgement that God has come to us and to all humanity in human form. No longer is God some kind of abstract philosophical concept, not just an idea of the mind or the divine being reserved for one small segment of society. In Jesus, God has been revealed in flesh and blood, living life the same way as each one of us lives each day of our lives. Jesus experienced joy and pain, hunger and thirst, acceptance and rejection and even baptism as well physical life as well as physical dead. We know what God is like because God made an unique entrance into our world in that human form as St Paul once said simply God was in Christ. In Epiphany we celebrate God coming in human form to all people; God in Jesus, in that same incarnation, God in the flesh.

Secondly if Jesus is God with us then we are called upon to love him and walk in his footsteps; our love of Jesus therefore our love of God because God first loved us. If we are serious about loving God then we must love what God loves without reservation and without exceptions. The coming of the Magi who were Gentiles, God demonstrated that God's love is for all humanity therefore our love must be the same for all humanity. Likewise we are called upon to reject those

things that God does not love. Some of which are presently sold to us as Christian by some public figures at the present time things like prejudices, selfishness, greed, envy, pride and hatred. All of these have no place in God's love. After all what makes us think that we can love these things that our Creator rejected as being beneath all human dignity. There is no great love than what God has for each one of us. So in Epiphany we are reminded that God's love is kept alive and is viable in the love that we have for one another and also for our brothers and sisters far beyond us out in the world.

And third, if Jesus is God with us; we are called upon to be as much like him as we possibly can by our thoughts, actions, by our words, our attitudes should be aimed at reflecting Jesus' presence right here in our hearts. How much more pleasant would life be if we could operate in this one small way. If we would be able to eliminate so much anxiety, so much causes us worry day by day. I think we would be more pleasant people to be with and our presence would constant source of joy and a constant source of hope to all around us. Epiphany then comes to remind us that there God to help each one of us to the kind of person that we need to be to face life each day. We are not alone unless we choose to be alone. God's presence in Jesus is always available to us in all places and in all times all ways and in the way. God provides for us the strength and grace to be the all to be the true image in which we were created. God intended us to be as Christ-like as Jesus as God's child, each one of us is a child of God. And so it is that we know in our mind what Sarah's father said what God is like and also that feel in our hearts like Sarah the presence of God in Jesus, a God with skin on.

Because of this Epiphany is a time when we can enjoy great joy in our heart because we know that God is with us as the words of this favorite carol reminds us

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in*