

January 13, 2013

Scripture Lessons ~

Isaiah 43: 1-7

Luke 3: 15-17, 21-22

Sermon *Someone With Skin On*

Well three year old Sara's bedroom down the hallway from her parents room, normally she was a sound sleeper, but every once in a while her Mother or Father were summoned to her room by quiet whimpering and tears because of a bad dream or because of the fear of the darkness. This time though Sara's father was awakened by violent screaming and outcry coming from her bedroom. He leapt from his bed, and he ran down the hallway to find Sara sitting up in her bed, holding her teddy bear, and sobbing great tears. Sitting down on the edge of the bed, Sara's father gathered her up in her arms and quietly asked her "what in the world is wrong"? And she told him about the terrible nightmare that she experienced and how frightened she was to be alone in her room in the dark. In a comforting tone, her father reassured her by saying that she never needed to be afraid because God loved her and because God was always with her. Sara thought about this for a moment and then she said in a surprising reply, "I love God too, but right now I am afraid I need someone with skin on, like you daddy, I need someone with skin on."

We as adults sometimes have a lot in common with poor little Sara. We are imperfect, we are a bit insecure sometimes, but nevertheless each day of our lives we are called upon to face our fears, our doubts, our failures, and our mistakes in life. And in the midst of the dark of the night we face the reality of what it means to be true human beings. We look for comfort, and we look for answers. But whom do we turn to for our comfort? Which of the two answers given by the father and the daughter are the correct ones? Both Sara and her father had their own ideas about who to go to when the darkness overwhelms us and we have no place else to turn. Sara's father who was not afraid at the time, was able to stand back and rationalize and to see that a person of faith faced with crisis, Almighty, all powerful, all knowing God is the answer. God will walk with us when the chips are down. But what would Sara have to say about all of that? Sara who was in the midst of crisis, Sara who was terribly afraid. She was not so concerned about a listing of the divine attributes of God, so much as she was having someone to wrap arms around her and to keep her warm when she was cold, and when she was afraid. And so which answer was right? The father or the daughter? I think if we

look at this passage from Luke's gospel this morning, we can see that both perspectives are needed, if we are to have a true picture of what God has done for us in his son Jesus, in this season of Epiphany.

We need to know that there is someone up there, that there is an all powerful, all knowing, just, and merciful, perfect, holy other being in control of what often seems to be a chaotic universe and world. We need to know that God is Divine, we need to know that God is transcendent. Secondly we need to know that, in Sara's words, that God is someone with skin on. As to be not so holy as to be able to identify with us, and to understand where we are coming from, who we are as human beings. We need to know that there is someone out there in the universe that understands us, someone who loves us, somebody that cares about us, someone who takes a personal interest in us as individuals. In short, we also need to know that God, what is called in theological terms, Eminent. That God has a human perspective on life as each of us knows it.

I think this is what the writer of Matthew and some of the Christmas passages that we were looking at earlier was saying, when he states that the birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophesy found in Isaiah. Isaiah writes, behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Immanuel. Which means what? God with us. And thus we are able to know and to see what God is like, because God has come to us in Jesus who is the Christ. No longer do we have to wonder or question what God is like. In the birth and the baptism of Jesus Christ, we have a true revelation of who God is, what God expects of each one of us in this world. God with us means first of all means a fancy theological word that means incarnation. Literally translated, Incarnation means 'In The Flesh'. The celebration of Epiphany, then is the acknowledgement that God has come to us and to all human beings in human form. No longer is God only sort of an abstract philosophical concept or an idea of the mind, or a Divine being reserved only for a small segment of the world society. Because in Jesus, God has revealed himself in flesh and blood, living life the same way each of us lives day by day. He experienced pain, joy, hunger, thirst, acceptance and rejection. Even baptism as we see in Luke's gospel from this morning as well as pain from physical death. We know what God is like because he has made a unique entrance into the world, in human form. As Saint Paul once said in his letters, God was in Christ. And so at Epiphany we celebrate God's coming in human form to all people. God in Jesus, the incarnation. But secondly if Jesus is God with us, then we are called upon to love him and to follow in his footsteps. Our love of Jesus and therefore our love of God is because God has first loved us. If we are serious about loving God, we must love what God loves without reservation, and without exception. In

the coming of the Magi, who were gentiles God demonstrated that his love is for all humanity. And therefore our love must be for all humanity as well. And likewise we are called upon to reject those things which God does not love, prejudice, selfishness, greed, envy, pride, hatred, all the things that do not have a place in God's love. After all what makes us think that we can love these things which our creator rejects, as being beneath all human dignity. There is no greater love which God has than the love God has for each one of us. So at Epiphany we are reminded that God's love is kept alive and viable in the love that we have for each other, and our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

If Jesus is God with us, then we are called upon to be like Jesus. All of our thoughts all of our actions, all of our words, all of our attitudes, should be aimed at reflecting Jesus Christ right here in our hearts. How much more pleasant life would be if we could operate in just that way. We would be able to eliminate all the things that cause us worry and anxiety. We would be much more pleasant people to be with, and our very presence would be a constant joy and hope for those around us. Epiphany, I think comes to remind us that God is there to help each one of us to be this kind of person and to have the strength to meet each new day because we are not alone unless we choose to be alone. God's presence in Jesus is always available in all places and in all time, always and in all ways. God provides for us the grace and the strength to fulfill the true image in which of us were created. And God in turn expects us to be Christ like, for Jesus was his child so too, and each one of us is a child of God. And so it is, we know in our mind, as Sara's father did, what God is like. And so it is also we feel in our hearts, like Sara the presence of God in Jesus Christ who is someone with skin on. Because of this Epiphany is a time when we can feel great joy in our hearts, as we know God is with us as this favorite Christmas carol reminds us each year as we sing it. God imparts to our human hearts the blessings of his heavens. No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still, then Christ enters them. God is up there, God is in here as well. Amen.