

+

Let us pray

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Good Morning!

Welcome to the first Sunday after Epiphany!

This week, as I considered the texts we were reading this Sunday,

I found myself drawn to the first, that from the prophet Isaiah.

I know that this reading will speak to the each soul in a different way, but in my reading and meditation, it drew me into a feeling of joy, of great promise.

All through Advent, I noticed something interesting, something we don't always find when we look at the Book of Common Prayer – it appeared that that the Daily Office readings were meant to

lead the reader move toward a greater understanding of the prophecies regarding Jesus, and what he was meant to do.

The prelude to my reaction to this morning's reading was the Morning Prayer reading for New Year's Day, that being Deuteronomy 30:1-10.

In this series of ten verses, Moses explains to Israel how to stay in God's favor. I read this, and it occurred to me – this idea is the synopsis for the Old Testament – in synopsis, if you obey God, keep His statutes and turn to him with all your heart, He will make you prosper.

What happened was, Israel kept falling down. Over and over again, mostly because they lost their grasp on this simple fact.

Then, as I puzzled about this, I got up from my reading, and started my day. It seemed so simple. What would ever have blocked them from noticing the truth of this passage?

Then, as I took a step past my bed, something in my left hip popped, and I was in considerable pain, so much that I couldn't even stand upright.

All the rest of what was going on was lost in my focus on this pain, and as the week wore on, I noticed I had to do a lot of things a second and a third time because I had missed a certain detail, a particular step.

Through all this, I realized what the Israelites problem was, because I was living it. They lived in distraction and the constancy of that distraction drowned out God's message.

They may have wavered, fallen, but He has ALWAYS remained faithful.

Then, I read and re-read today's first reading. And the joy came to me, and reprises itself whenever I read this passage (and that's why I asked the lector to swap readings with me this morning.)

Consider all the things that Israel did, incidents where they doubted, or turned away from God. At some point, we all would stop and say “Enough is enough”

But He didn't. In this passage from Isaiah, he lays it all out. Arise, Shine, for your Light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon thee! And the Gentiles shall come to the thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

After it all – being spread to the four winds by the Diaspora and other worldly cruelties, God would bring them all together. The fascinating part about this passage is its dual nature, as we see in other places. It also applies to the church.

We are all spread to the winds, preaching and teaching all over the world, but there will be a day when He will call us all together, with Him, forever.

This faithfulness belies the love that God has for us all

In short, the entire Bible is a love story.

At first, it is between God and Israel – He gives them rules to live by, and they are unable to follow them as He needs for them to, and they are punished for the mistakes they made.

The New Testament takes that story to a new level. Since the rules weren't working as intended, God decides to intervene directly, and sends us His Son to guide us in the way to go, to write the law in our hearts. Then, from Jesus' words and actions, the church writes the latter part of the New Testament as a historical recording of the events of their lives and ministries.

God never gives up on us.

Epiphany is the season we are in. In the Greek language, it means 'bold or strong revelation' In this season, Jesus was revealed to be the Son of God by the visits of the Magi and that event's compliance with the prophecies of the Old Testament.

And what should Epiphany be to us today? Joy at the prospect of a loving God that calls to each of us, in our own way, through the distractions of our lives and our pains.

He just wants us to know He is there, constant, loving and forgiving.

Let us pray.

Father in Heaven, we thank you for the gift of your joy, and the ability we have to share in it through sudden revelation and clearing away of those many distractions in our lives. May we continue to see Your Hand in our lives and hearts. All this we ask through Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ AMEN>.