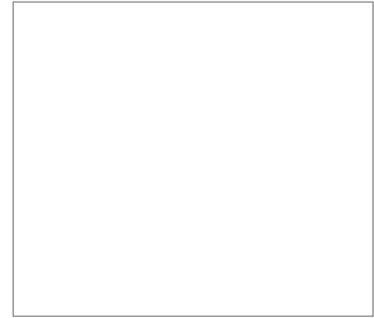


The Lessons Appointed for Use on the
Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Year C
RCL



Psalm 71:1-6

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 71:1-6 Page 683, BCP

In te, Domine, speravi

- 1 In you, O LORD, have I taken refuge;
let me never be ashamed.
- 2 In your righteousness, deliver me and set me free;
incline your ear to me and save me.
- 3 Be my strong rock, a castle to keep me safe;
you are my crag and my stronghold.
- 4 Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the clutches of the evildoer and the oppressor.
- 5 For you are my hope, O Lord GOD,
my confidence since I was young.
- 6 I have been sustained by you ever since I was born;
from my mother's womb you have been my strength;
my praise shall be always of you.

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowl-

edge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Luke 4:21-30

In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read from the book of the prophet Isaiah, and began to say, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.

There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

SERMON

I heard on the news this week that Congress actually has a real shot at a bi-partisan bill reforming our immigration laws. I'm stoked. It's up to us to keep them out. If Congress doesn't act and act decisively, in a couple of generations, this whole country will be made up of nothing but the sons and grandsons of immigrants.

Oh...wait...we're already the sons and grandsons of immigrants, aren't we?

Well, you know what I mean...there are people like us, good, Christian, tax paying people who are just like us, and then there are those who aren't just like us, and they're them, and ... uh...no...I don't like the way this is going, either.

OK, look, my problem with them is that they don't talk like us, and they eat weird food, and they don't act like us, and...No, darn it! That won't do, either. I love

Mexican food, and mein Großvater war ein deutscher Sprecher. Und Mein Urgroßvater wurde in Deutschland geboren. I mean, my grandfather was a German speaker and his father was born in Germany and my great grandmother never learned to speak English.

Superbowl Sunday is a great day to confess that this is how we are. We are “us and them” creatures, intoxicated with competition for resources, for acknowledgment, even for the love of God. We’re slaves to our commitment to competition. Maybe it all started in pre-history when we were still running around naked in the jungle hitting rabbits in the head with rocks. That which is good for my tribe is good by definition. That which is good for some other tribe is only good if we can steal it. Boyd County has suffered for generations from a bad case of double government because to unify the city and county governments would mean the end of the Ash-

land-Boyd County Game, and nobody's going to permit that. And don't even me get started about UK and Louisville.

The need to divide the world into the righteous, good "us" and the unrighteous, evil "them" is a sickness from which we suffer unknowing. In the end we have to confess that there is only one Creation, only one Creator, and we are all His children. We are all part of a tapestry woven by God. We see tatters and threads and knots, but we are looking at the back. God's view of His creation is much different. God looks at the completed front.

In view of our checkered past and flawed natures, it's not at all hard to understand why the Synagogue in Nazareth was so excited last week when Jesus read a prediction of the coming Savior from Isaiah, then told them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your

hearing.” They were torqued. It was like winning a first round draft pick. You’ve signed a great, strong player to play for your team! Huzzah! Quite apart from the great thing of having the Savior among you, think of the tourist dollars. This could do miracles for the Nazareth economy! It’s no wonder that all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth! Their tribe was going to score and score big!

The trouble in Nazareth began when Jesus told them that God has no tribes, only children.

But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.

Elijah gifted the widow of Zarephath, a non-Jew, with a container of flour and a jug of oil which never ran dry, even though widows in Judah were just as hungry. Naaman, a Syrian and a non-Jew, was cured of his leprosy by Elisha, even though there were plenty of lepers in Judea at the time. God has no tribes. God has children. Jesus' words must have fallen upon them in the same way we would hear a report that UK had recruited the greatest high school player ever, signed him up, gave him a jersey, called a press conference only to hear him say that he viewed Louisville with compassion, and that he was going to do everything he could to help Louisville and all the other teams that play UK to play the best basketball they possibly could, and he'd coach them, also.

They reacted just as you might expect – they ran Him out of town and would have done worse if He

hadn't gotten away. Not being a good team player is a good way to get yourself in a great deal of trouble.

I spoke last week of worship as submission. This week, I want us to focus on worship as opening a channel through which God can speak to us. In particular, I want to draw our attention away from the idea of opening a channel through which we can talk to God, for if we speak to God, nine times out of ten, what we will be speaking is our very natural wish that our tribe flourish, even at the expense of the other tribes. If we allow God to speak to us, nine times out of ten it will be to remind us that God loves all His children, even the ones we find insufferable.

To the extent you can, I would like you to put yourself in the sandals of Jesus on that Sabbath. Jesus, the man we know to have had that perfect channel to God's will, has returned home, to the people and the places so

familiar to him from his childhood. He has read in the Synagogue, and He has spoken the truth the Father has given to Him to speak. Suddenly, the familiar faces of his village are twisted in anger. Fists are shaken. He is shouted down. I was run off stage once when I was younger. It's a horrible experience, but I wasn't going to get killed — the bar owner just didn't like my music. These people were enraged. It was a riot. They grabbed Jesus. Cruelly they dragged him from the bimah and from the Synagogue. Outside, the call is raised for his death! His words had so angered them, the thought that God might love all His children had so offended them, that they dragged him, the voices cursing him all the way, to the top of a cliff to throw him over. If Jesus wasn't going to give 110% for the Nazareth team and help them to smite their enemies, then the smiting was going to be on him. Ultimately, of course, that is just

what did happen. Not being a good team player is indeed a good way to get yourself in a great deal of trouble.

Not just these people but all people are slaves to their own truth. Unless that channel for God to speak to us is open, we will rationalize perfectly reasonable excuses to do perfectly unreasonable things and think ourselves righteous as we do it. When I was younger, I had a Vietnamese client who had married an American. They were getting divorced. I drove her to court in another county through an area where there was construction. We were stopped and the construction company detonated some dynamite. Before I knew what had happened, Than was on the floor of the car covering her head and crying, “Oh, me! Bombs come!” We did that to her. The Viet Cong had no bombers.

It is this stubborn refusal to let go of our Neolithic

self-centered pursuit of resources for us at the expense of them that the church calls “sin” for the lessons Jesus taught were not about competition, but about a servant lifestyle. When Jesus encountered suffering — a blind man, a lame man, a sick woman, a grieving parent — he restored the person to health. He did not ask to see the identification papers of the woman at the well, and he most certainly didn’t pick the sick man’s pocket, confident that he was too powerless to protest.

In Jesus’ time, poverty and sickness were seen as curses laid upon the sufferer as punishment for sins against God. That seems so impossibly old-fashioned to our ears, but how often have each of us said or thought, when considering those too poor to afford medical care, those marginalized because of poverty or addiction, that they brought it on themselves by failing to work for a living? We’ve substituted sins against the American

work ethic for sins against God, but the effect is the same. We can walk by suffering and be untouched by it. That inattention to the suffering of others is the curse we have laid upon ourselves, and it is from precisely this that Jesus has come to free us.

I was being lectured on this point not too long ago by someone who explained to me that the country should run like a family budget. If there is no money, we just don't spend it. I suggested that she might view the situation differently if the choice she had to make in her family budget was which of her children to feed lavishly, and which to let starve. This is God's view. God has no "us and them". God has children. God loves His children and bids us to do so as well.

Paul spoke to his church in Corinth of the overriding necessity of acting from love.

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of an-

gels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

The first act of worship is submission, a willingness to submit your will to that of the Father. The second act of worship is to open the channel through which God can speak to you of His love for His children. When you have done both, you will hear the message of love that Paul wrote about, and you can then commit yourself to it. Until you do, you remain captive to your limited insistence on a world of us and them and closed to the freedom offered by God. Jesus taught us that God is not the Great Gotcha in the Sky, but the physician who comes to free us from that which enslaves us.

We are given two narratives – the one is our stub-

born commitment to the good of ourselves and our tribe which lead us to nail a guy to a cross. The second narrative is to confess there is only one Creation, only one Creator, and that He loves his children, just as we love our own children. Our way is the way of death. His way is the way of life. Our addiction to doing things our way enslaves us to a path leading only to suffering and death of the many in service to the comfort of the few. God's story, from Moses to the Messiah is one of curing us from our peculiar illness and freeing us from the chains we have imposed upon ourselves.

To be healed is to submit and to listen, church. There is no us and them. There are only God's children.

AMEN

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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