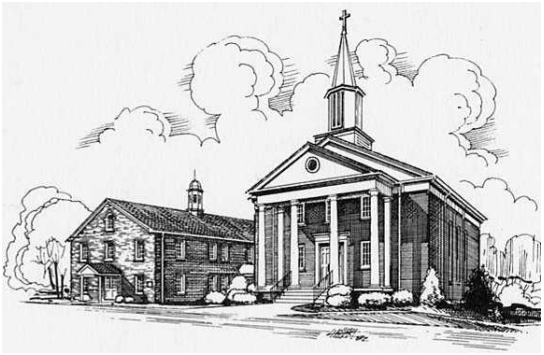
The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Second Sunday after the Epiphany



Year A

RCL

Isaiah 49:1-7
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
Psalm 40:1-12

The Collect

Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ is the light of the world: Grant that your people, illumined by your Word and Sacraments, may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ our

Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*.

Isaiah 49:1-7

Listen to me, O coastlands,
  pay attention, you peoples from far away!
The LORD called me before I was born,
  while I was in my mother's womb he named me.
He made my mouth like a sharp sword,
  in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me a polished arrow,
  in his quiver he hid me away.
And he said to me, “You are my servant,
  Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”
But I said, “I have labored in vain,
  I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;
yet surely my cause is with the LORD,
  and my reward with my God.”

And now the LORD says,
  who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
  and that Israel might be gathered to him,

for I am honored in the sight of the LORD,
  and my God has become my strength--
he says,
"It is too light a thing that you should be my ser-
  vant
  to raise up the tribes of Jacob
  and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
  that my salvation may reach to the end of the
  earth."

Thus says the LORD,
  the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,
  the slave of rulers,
"Kings shall see and stand up,
  princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,
because of the LORD, who is faithful,
  the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been en-riched in him, in speech and knowledge of every

kind-- just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you-- so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON

From the news:

> **The U.S. Jewish community experienced near-historic levels of anti-Semitism in 2018, including a doubling of anti-Semitic assaults and the single deadliest attack against the Jewish community in American history, according to new data from ADL (the Anti-Defamation League) issued today. ADL's annual Audit of Anti-Semitic incidents recorded a total of 1,879 attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions across the country in 2018, the third-highest year on record since ADL started tracking such data in the 1970s.**

Didn't we finish all this in 1945? Didn't Norm and the greatest generation shout "NO" to this? And did not God Himself say to Isaiah:

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

God gave Israel as a light unto the nations so that His salvation may reach to the end of the earth, and even now, nearly 3,000 years later, some respond with violence and death, shouting obscenities like, “Jews will not replace us”. How can this be? What kind of nonsense could fuel such towering hatred? Upon what bitter herbs do those who keep this hatred alive sup? Even more horrifying, those filled with this hatred often identify themselves as Christian and often quote the Bible in support of their

hatred. The BIBLE! If this sort of hypocrisy is all of Christianity known to those to whom we are to bring the Gospel, is it any wonder so many churches are on the real estate market here?

History is filled with examples of people who read the Bible just to find what they want to find. Understanding what we read and incorporating it into our lives is crucial, but that requires study and effort. If we skip the hard parts and satisfy ourselves with the easy parts, we will make mistakes, and from such mistakes come things like anti-Semitism. If I were to offer one criticism of American Christianity, it would be this: we've made it too easy. In the minds of too many, American Christianity has become too much of a search for

personal salvation and too little attention to God's will for us in His Creation. Our faith was nourished on the blood of martyrs. They did not die because they sang the wrong hymns. They died because they spoke of the supremacy of God's Word. Dr. King wasn't killed because he was "uppity". He was killed because he exposed the hypocrisy of those who wished to claim the name Christian while espousing hatred and violence. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wasn't hanged by the Nazis for some disagreement over theology, but for speaking plainly of the hypocrisy of the government-sponsored efforts to unify all Protestant churches into a single pro-Nazi Protestant Reich Church.

Jesus taught love of all of God's children – white

brothers and sisters, black brothers and sisters, Jewish brothers and sisters, Muslim brothers and sisters. All of them. And why not? We are all of the same family, and I'm not speaking metaphorically. I took one of those DNA tests and learned something astonishing:

> **If every person living today could trace his or her maternal line back over thousands of generations, all of our lines would meet at a single woman who lived in eastern Africa between 150,000 and 200,000 years ago. Though she was one of perhaps thousands of women alive at the time, only the diverse branches of her haplogroup have survived to today.**

A haplogroup is a group of people who share the same DNA segment. There's a similar great-great-great grandfather whose haplogroup still exists. I

want to call them Adam and Eve, but that's a cheap shot. I'll call this woman in eastern Africa from whom we are all descended "Granny". We each carry a bit of her DNA. When we ask, "Where does the violence come from?" we must ask also, "Could it be built into Granny's DNA, the DNA we all share?"

The shadow of Granny's world still haunts us. Granny's world was a tribal world — one of competition for scarce resources. The winners ate and were filled. The losers starved. Today's world is one of competition for control of plentiful resources. Such a competition no longer seeks blessings for the victor, but seeks to visit curses on the losers by denying to the poor, the sick, and infirm

access to the resources necessary for life. The shadow of Granny's world insists that there is no more important task than to identify and destroy those who compete with us for resources, but St. Basil the Great summarized the teachings of our faith in this fashion:

> **"When someone steals another's clothes, we call them a thief. Should we not give the same name to one who could clothe the naked and does not? The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the coat unused in your closet belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the one who has no shoes; the money which you hoard up belongs to the poor."[1]**

And Paul, writing to the church in Galatia, said:

1 Basil the Great

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.[2]

And despite all that, here we sit in 2020 and anti-Semitism is resurgent. This is simply unacceptable! How have so many attended so closely to Granny's teachings that they ignore the clear teaching of Christ Himself and still think themselves righteous? And how do we, who walk the path Christ showed us, however imperfectly, bring that message to our brothers?

2 Galatians 5:13-15

Let’s leave the history lesson behind for a minute and talk about us. We are not so different from the Jews who could not accept the witness of the Christians. They couldn’t accept the possibility of change, just as we have difficulty embracing change. Of all the things we don’t like to change, our religion is number one. We want no surprises on Sunday morning. We want familiar hymns, and a familiar liturgy. It’s good that we don’t go running off after every new thing that comes along. That’s the inertia of community which keeps us on an even keel. Nevertheless, we have to give space in which God can work or we become like the concrete lions in front of the public library — looking fierce but utterly powerless. God has the run of his

entire creation, not just the lawn of our beliefs. This is why it is so important that we not let our ideas of God calcify into stone lions.

Once upon a time, the Devil and his friend were closely following a man. The man stooped and picked up something.

“What did he find?” the Devil’s friend asked.

“A piece of the truth”, the Devil answered.

“Doesn’t that worry you, that he now has a piece of the truth?” the friend asked.

“Not at all”, old Scratch replied. “I’ll just let him make a belief of it.”

Those who utter hateful things about Jews or Muslims or other groups do not speak the Gospel. They speak of Granny’s world experience 120,000

years ago. They are not our brothers in Christ, but they are children of God. We must reach out to them in love as well. This is hard, and dangerous. We have made American Christianity too easy. It is time for the hard work.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

If you ask a random sample of church-goers why they bother to do this odd thing we do each Sunday, my sense is that a lot would answer, “To get to heaven when I die.” WRONG ANSWER. We go to church to empower us spiritually to get about our Father’s business in the world.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

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

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