

January 5th Sermon using the Day of Epiphany Texts.

Text: Ephesians 3:1-12 and Matthew 2:1-2.

One of the things we have done as a family for family devotions is called Jesus, Junk and Joy. It is a way to check in at the end of the day... a form of family devotions. Trust me we are not Ned Flanders family on the Simpsons singing, "I've got the joy, joy, joy..."

First, Jesus: Who was your Jesus that day? Who offered you unexpected grace? Who did something nice for you? Who surprised you with an act of love? With my Son Eli, the tall one, it is usually whoever gave him food that day who is his Jesus. Junk: what was your junk that day? What didn't go so well? Often that leads us voicing the hurts of the day. And trust me, there are plenty to go around. And your joy? Where did you find joy that day?

I will try to illustrate. For our family, this weekend was a basketball weekend. We went to my son Eli's Neenah High School JV game at Appleton North last night and stayed for the Varsity Game. Then today we spent the morning in Fond du Lac for my son, Ezra's 6th grade tournament.

I will start with my joy, first. My joy was in Appleton. Even though Neenah took its first loss of the season, my joy was seeing Our Savior's Member, Karen Lippert, her son, husband, and two of her grandsons at the game. Recently Karen, who has been a fixture on our prayer list, had a good scan and got an unexpected break from Chemotherapy. She is making the most of her time. Watching her spoil her grandkids with grandma time and love was a joy for me to see.

My Jesus came today in Fond du Lac. After Ezra's game, some of the families from Ezra's team were out in the entryway. I asked what time the next game was. After exchanging introductions, one of the parents invited Jeranna, Ezra, and I to join the team for brunch at Faros restaurant. We met there and all sat in the same area. They had a clever idea. We ordered and split up the bill by the number on our kid's jersey. My kid is 31.

Back to my Jesus. As you might imagine, it is hard to move to a new community and try to break into already established groups. It takes someone to extend their bridge, say hello, or invite. This invite was my Jesus for the weekend. When we arrived, Ezra was invited to sit with some of the boys on the team. We sat with the parents, answered questions about our move, where I work, and if we found a home or not. We named God as an active participant in helping us find a home. We were revealing bits and pieces of our life and they did the same. It felt great to be included. We could have declined the invitation and went to McDonalds, which was our original plan. But we said, "Yes." You never know how God when bless you when you are open to the Spirit.

My junk for the week is not getting enough sleep due to Marcella having a cold. She is doing better now, but now I have a little something.

I feel our lessons for today speak to what I experienced this weekend, this feeling of being included. So during this season of Epiphany in the church, our lessons reveal more about the identity of this baby born in a manger.

This week, we see that Jesus is for the whole world. All nations are coming to seek the Messiah. People formerly left out of God's plan of salvation are now included. In our Isaiah text, the prophet says Arabian tribal groups of Midian, Ephah, Sheba, and Nebaioth will come from the east to offer gifts to the savior. This is modern day Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria.

In our Ephesians lesson, the writer, who identifies himself as the apostle Paul speaks of the mystery of Christ's grace. He writes in verse 5, "⁵In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

Jews and Gentiles are now a part of the same body sharing in the promise of Jesus Christ found in the gospel. The Greek word for gospel is Euangelion. It literally means good news. In a world

where news is dominated by what's wrong in the world, we need more good news. Would you agree? We call Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John the 4 gospels. Euangelion is where we get the word Evangelism. Evangelism is sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. That can be done in word and deed. Often our actions speak the gospel louder than words. We are the ELCA, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. In other words, we are a good news church. That means we proclaim that we aren't saved by anything we can do, but what God has done in Jesus Christ on the cross and in the resurrection.

Paul says in Ephesians that the church possesses the wisdom of this mystery. We are the torch bearers to pass on the good news of Jesus to the world. For me, my Jesus this weekend was how wonderful it felt to be invited and included. To those folks, they may not even be professing Christians, but they gave us the gift of welcome. I believe this is one of our callings as a church to extend the welcome of Jesus to all. To invite others to hear the gospel.

In our Gospel from Matthew, we have a final example of God's inclusiveness in Jesus Christ. Wise men, or astronomers from the east, gentile foreigners, saw a star of wonder that they inquired about. You know the story, they saw the star in the West and followed it to Jerusalem. There, they found out that the prophets predicted the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. King Herod found out about the magi and secretly employed them to find the Messiah. When the wise men saw where the star had stopped they encounter Mary and the baby Jesus. The scriptures said when they saw Jesus, their hearts were filled with joy. Here, foreigners, Gentiles from the East have been changed by Jesus. Their joy turned into action. They knelt down, a form of worship, and gave their best gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Then in a dream they were warned about Herod's motivations to destroy Jesus so they went home by another road. I think this is a metaphor our faith... taking another road. Yes, we will mess up. Leave people out. And turn in on ourselves.

But today, like the wise men, we have encountered Jesus in the Word, fellowship, and sacrament. We heard that God's grace is sufficient

for us. We are forgiven from all the times we leave others out and set free to leave as changed people... to walk by a different road.