

February 17, 2019 – Jeremiah 17:5-8, 1 Corinthians 15:12-26, Luke 6:17-26

“Manifested by the star... manifested at Jordan's stream... manifested at Cana... manifested in power divine... God in man made manifest.” *Songs of Thankfulness and Praise* is one of my favorite hymns of the Epiphany season. It's such a wonderful summary of God the Son's divine manifestation on earth. Of all the ways Jesus displayed his divine glory.

A star in the sky, leading the wise men to Jesus' side. The voice of God the Father and the Spirit coming down like a dove at Jesus' baptism. The divine power displayed as Jesus turned water into wine at Cana.

And then, of course, all the other astonishing displays of power that come after. Palsied limbs made whole through amazing acts of healing. The power of the devil quelled in dramatic fashion as demons are cast out. This is what it means to be blessed by the Epiphany of God's presence... right?

Well, yes and no. I mean, those people who followed Jesus' star, witnessed his baptism, enjoyed the wedding feast at Cana, and benefited from all the other acts of power and healing that Jesus displayed were certainly blessed by them. They praised God time after time for all that they had heard and seen and experienced.

But are they the only ones who were blessed? Our Gospel lesson says that multitudes came from Judea and Jerusalem, Tyre and Sidon – from the far south to the far north of Palestine – to hear Jesus and to be healed of their diseases. And everyone was cured. Jesus' power came out of him in such quantity that you only had to get near him, to touch him, and you would be healed.

But what about the multitudes who couldn't reach Jesus? The people who were paralyzed, but didn't have four friends to lower them through the roof? The people who arrived a day later, only to find that Jesus had already moved on to another region? What about those people who never even heard about Jesus until he had already ascended into heaven?

What of them? Are they not blessed by Jesus' Epiphany? What of us? Are we not blessed by Jesus' Epiphany?

Because it's easy to look at Jesus' ministry and see it as one long string of Jesus solving everyone's problems... except mine. It's easy to look at Jesus' ministry and wonder, “Where's my blessing?”

Why don't I get the visual proof of God's existence? Why don't I get the miraculous healing? Why don't I get enough food to feed five thousand out of five loaves and two fish? Why didn't I get someone I love back from the dead?

Why not me? Why am I not blessed like they were? It's easy to think this way. And it's easy to doubt this way.

And so Jesus is really saying these words in our Gospel lesson to us. Because the people around him? They didn't really need to hear this. Not at that moment, at least. They had had all their immediate problems solved. But later, they would have more problems to solve. More suffering to struggle through. More grief to bear. What do they do then?

And so Jesus stops and he takes a moment and he says, “You all think you're blessed to be here with me right now, feeding your hunger and healing your injuries and curing your diseases. And you are. But all the people who come after you are blessed too.”

*“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy...”*

Why? Why are we still blessed in the midst of poverty and hunger and sorrow and persecution? *“Because your reward is great in heaven.”* Because this is not all there is. Because this has been happening since the beginning of world. Since the time of the prophets. They put their hope in something more than the suffering of this life. So can you.

You see, what Jesus was giving them was a blessing. The blessing of temporary healing and temporary contentment and temporary joy. But that pales in comparison to the the greater blessing he had planned.

The blessing of a world without suffering. The blessing of a world without poverty or hunger. The blessing of a world without sinful people at all. The blessing of eternal life with Him.

You see, we call this season Epiphany, because it's when Christ is revealed to the world. But in that first revelation of his glory, Christ is also revealing his future glory. The glory of his second coming. The glory of a world where every blessing that God can give to us is given to us for all eternity.

Which means that if we look at the work of Christ for those relatively few people in Palestine and think that this is all it means to be blessed by God, then we have become like that second group of people that Jesus describes. The people of woe.

*“Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.”* If you think that God is blessing you with great wealth because that's what it means to be his child, well then you can turn to your money for consolation. But don't expect anything else from God.

*“Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.”* If you think that man lives by bread alone and needs nothing else but a full belly, well then you can go ahead and eat to your heart's content, while your spirit starves.

*“Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.”* If you can't see any reason to worship a God who let's bad things happen to his followers, well then go ahead and make pleasure your god. Eat, drink, and be merry. For one day you will die. And you won't be laughing anymore.

*“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”* You know, it's fitting that our Old Testament Lesson is from Jeremiah. Jeremiah who tried so desperately to warn God's people about their idolatry. Warn them about their injustice. Warn them about their corruption.

Warn them that they were doing the exact same thing that Jesus describes here. Putting their trust in their own strength. In their own prosperity. And turning away from the Lord. Who wanted nothing more than to give them life and salvation.

But they didn't want to listen to Jeremiah. They took him and tossed him into a pit, rather than listen. And they turned to their false prophets, who promised that God would always give them health, wealth, and prosperity. All the way up until the Babylonians came and dragged them into captivity.

The blessings of God are all around us. But they're not always found in miracles and signs and wonders. In healing and food and laughter.

No, the blessings of God are found in hope. Hope in the resurrection. Hope in a world freed from sin and death. Hope in Jesus Christ. To be a Christian and not put your hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to be of all people most pitied. Because that is the whole point.

That the God who suffered and died for you has made a way through suffering and death into eternal life. That those who die have not truly perished, but have simply fallen asleep in Christ until that great day when wakes us up. That those who belong to Christ will reign with Christ until he has put all enemies under his feet, and finally destroys that last enemy: death itself.

Blessed are you even when you don't feel very blessed. For the blessings of God aren't found in silver and gold. They're not found in strength and health. They're not found in the things of this world.

The blessings of God are found in his Son dying on the cross. The blessings of God are found in his empty tomb. And the blessings of God are found in the Word and Sacrament we receive here today. So that we might eat this bread and drink this cup and proclaim the Lord's death until he does come again.

Until that day when his power comes out of him and he heals not just those multitudes who gathered that day. But when he heals this whole world of sin. And gives us a world that is truly a blessing to us for all eternity. Amen.