1/9/2022

The Way to God’s Holiness (Matthew 10:40-42)

Good morning, God’s blessings to you. May the Spirit of God open our hearts and minds to his words as we have this time of reflection. As all of you know, today is the Epiphany Sunday. Epiphany is the 13th day of Christmas which means that it happens on January 6th every year. What is interesting is that Sunday close to January 6th is the Sunday to celebrate Epiphany. So depending on which day Epiphany falls on in the week, The Epiphany Sunday could be the first or second Sunday in January. This year, Epiphany was on last Thursday and that is the reason why we celebrate Epiphany today.

Epiphany is a season to commemorate the revealing of Jesus as the Christ to the Gentiles

in the persons of Magi. According to the Biblical account, three Magi from the east followed

the star which led them to the Christ-child. The Magi, the three wise men, visited Jesus and

worshipped him with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The word “Epiphany” which

is from the Greek word “epiphania,” means “appearance” or “manifestation.” The arrival of the

three wise men was a sign that the incarnation of God in Christ had been made known to the

world. When God came into our world in the form of the Christ-child, he came for the whole

humanity.

He came not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. We do not know exactly where in

the east these three wise men were from but what we know is that the Magi were gentiles.

Obviously, the point of Epiphany is very clear. The Christ-child who came into our world as the

Light is manifested in the world - not only the shepherds in the field saw on the Christmas night but magi from the east saw it as well. They all came to worship the Christ-child. This Christ-child, the Light, is shining in us and around us. So, Epiphany is about the revealing, manifesting, of the Light to the world.

In Matthew chapter 5, verses 14 and 16, Jesus said “you are the light of the world. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” This morning, as we are celebrating Epiphany, God is inviting all of us to be just that – the light of the world, revealing Christ Jesus, so that others might also experience through us the Light and see Jesus.

Having that in mind, I would like to reflect on the Matthew’s gospel text this morning. Our text is a well known passage for all of us. In this passage, Jesus is talking abut being righteous. Who can be righteous – who can be holy in God’s sight. Of course, there are many ways for us to talk about being “holy.” But, this is one place in the Bible in which Jesus is talking about being righteous in a very concise and certain term. In this sense, Jesus is answering a question, “how can we, Christians, become holy?”

Long time ago, when I was studying at Teacher’s College, Columbia University, I had the privilege of taking a class taught by Dewayne Hubner, one of the pillars of Christian education in America. One of my class notes had these words of Dr. Hubner. “Words like piety, sanctity, and holiness seem out of fashion in modern society. Especially, the word “holy” is considered by many that it is only reserved for characterizing the remote and detached life-style of the mystic. The consequence of this view is that ordinary people in society do not see “holiness” as a part of daily living. Thus, the Biblical meaning of “holiness” has become obscure. There is an urgent need for us to recover the meaning of “holiness” as Christians.” I am paraphrasing Dr. Hubner’s point but what he was saying was very clear. In today’s world, people, even Christians, have uneasiness talking about “Holiness” and often view it as an entity from a remote and distant world.

One pastor defines “Holiness” in this way. “For all Christians, holiness is the art of doing God’s will.” In today’s gospel text, Jesus also puts it very clearly. “Jesus said “He who welcomes me welcomes Him who sent me… He who welcomes a holy man because he is known to be holy receives a holy man’s reward.” In other words, it takes one to know one. Jesus’ holiness proceeds from his knowledge of the Father in Heaven, the source of all holiness. And, our holiness proceeds from our knowledge of the Lord, Jesus who is the incarnation of holiness. Throughout the Bible, we see Jesus saying, “Take up your cross and come after me!” “Follow me, do as I say, and do as I do.” “Love one another as I have loved you.” And, I think these are our definition of being righteous, being holy. A holy person is one who does what Jesus said and loves others as Jesus loved.

We all know what a catalyst does. Catalyst is an agent that helps other entities to change without itself being changed. One of the examples is platinum. If you put hydrogen and oxygen together at room temperature, nothing happens. However, if you put them together with platinum, hydrogen and oxygen instantly combine into water. For this process, platinum acts as catalyst – helping hydrogen and oxygen change into water but remains itself unchanged. For all of us, love of Jesus can act as our catalyst and we can then be catalyst for others in our daily living.

“You are the light of the world. Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” “If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my child, he will certainly not lose his reward from heaven.” In Matthew chapter 25, we see Jesus talking about the judgement day. Everyone of us will be judged based on how we conducted our lives on earth. On the judgement day, the Lord will say to the righteous, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.” (vs. 35) And, in the verse 40, the Lord will say, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.” Anyone who attends to and takes care of, the needs of the “little ones,” will be called righteous and holy.

In the church of Corinth, the church for which St. Paul labored hard and which he had built from scratch, there were many things beginning to go wrong after his departure to other places. People were beginning to choose sides and factions were created within the Christian community. Some even argued over preachers. Some said that Paul was the best preacher, but some preferred a preacher named Apollos. Others liked St. Peter over Paul and Apollos. Some were suing others in court, and some were looking down on others of lesser social status.

In the midst of all these arguments and divisions, St. Paul sent them advice. But, his advice was not to tell them to get a new pastors or start new programs. What they lacked, St. Paul wrote, was the holy catalyst of love. St. Paul said, what they needed was a love that is patient, kind, not jealous or boastful, and arrogant. This is love that is described in the first Corinthians chapter 13. Love that is not rude, not self-seeking, and not prone to anger. I am sure that this is as true in the 21st century as in the first century - as true in our own as in ancient Corinth.

In the great bazaars – markets in Istanbul or Cairo, one can see men sitting at their places in the section of the silversmiths and beside them are piles of coins. These coins are melted down, fashioned into little silver charms, and sold to the tourists. This is done in the most old-fashioned way. The silversmith drops a coin into the molten silver. In a little while, the silversmith takes a sieve and scrapes off the impurities on top. Then, he looks intently into the bowl. And, if you ask him, “What are you sitting there to see?” he would say, “I keep it on the fire until there is no scum, until I can see myself reflected as in the best mirror.”

In the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi says these words in the chapter 3. “God shall sit as a refiner of silver.” (vs.3) God says, “I am going to make my people holy. I am going to keep them in the fire until all the jealousy, the hatred and self-seeking has been scaped away. Then, I will see my face in them and will know that my people have been made holy.”

This morning, Jesus has given us the Biblical meaning of “holiness” in a very clear and concise manner. According to Jesus, serving a cup of cold water to a person in need will qualify us to be righteous – holy in God’s sight. And, in this way, each one of us can live a life that is righteous and holy. Only through Jesus Christ, we are made holy and righteous. Jesus is inviting us to continue to live a life that is holy and righteous. Especially in this season of Epiphany, we need to remember the path of the Magi and let the Light of the Christ-child be revealed through us.