

# Sermon: Epiphany 4

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Year C

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalms 71:1-6

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

We've been set up... we've been set up to think... to believe... to act... as though God loves only us... we've been set up to feel as though we're the center of the universe... and remember that when Galileo rejected the church's arrogance which put us there... when he said it was the Earth that revolved around the Sun... he was tried by the Inquisition for heresy... we've been set up by a sense of American exceptionalism... to believe that what we know... what we do... the way we live... the sometimes excessive lifestyles we produce... are part of our manifest destiny... are the highest good... that we deserve them and others don't... that's part of why access to the voting booth has been curtailed... that's part of why the water in Flint has become poisoned... that's part of why the rich are getting richer... and we've been set up by the systems in which we live... to think there's not enough to go around... and that we need to hoard the world's resources... and keep them for ourselves... our nation... or our tribe...

Have any of you ever seen that show Hoarders... [pause]... the hoarding is always a symptom of some underlying emotional or psychological dis-ease which fosters that kind of behavior... take the expression of that dysfunction... and you end up with a society that's forgotten how to share... that encourages greed... and which passes extreme laws so some can hoard money and power and authority... while others become so poor... they don't have enough to live on...

Richard Rohr wrote: *The flow of grace through us... is largely blocked... when we live inside a worldview of scarcity... a feeling that there's not enough... not enough of God... enough of me... enough food... enough mercy to include and forgive all faults... the problem is made worse by the fact that the mind is apparently unable to imagine anything infinite... so it cannot imagine a God whose love is infinite...*

*But an enduring abundance is described clearly in all of the multiplication stories in the Gospels... when Jesus feeds the crowds with very little... notice that in almost every case... the apostles... who represent our worldview of scarcity... advise against it... but Jesus is trying to move them to a worldview of abundance... in the end there's always plenty of food left over... in other words... there is an inherent overflowing in creation... reality always has more than enough of itself to give...*

Selfishness is an expression of evil... and mainline churches don't generally do very well talking about that... don't generally do very well talking about the Devil... we don't understand fully how what we call the Devil... the *Diabolous*... is really any system which creates divisions that support one group at the expense of another...

Rachel Held Evans points out that many who yearn for a great American past... yearn for one that ignores the historical suffering of women and minority groups... suffer from an overwrought persecution complex that confuses sharing civil rights with others with being persecuted by them... experience a fear of the Other that results in culture wars meant to "take back" the public square... and what's fascinating... is that so many people who reflect these desires... identify as Christian... some even believe that being wished "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas" by a store clerk is a form of religious oppression... but seem unconcerned about how that would be received by those of other faiths... they're Christians who largely operate out of a worldview of scarcity... of there not being enough... and what's there is there for them alone... that they're God's favored people... that God speaks to them... comes to them... loves only them... and there is division...

In the synagogue... Jesus said the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing... he's trying to tell those in his hometown... that they were not chosen by God to form a closed society... that they're not the sole beneficiaries of divine blessings and abundance... but that they were chosen to bring God's benefits to all people... that God's abundance spills out past even Jewish boundaries...

And the first person Jesus lifts up... the first person he names after his forty days in the wilderness... as an example... is a woman... and a widow... and a foreigner... a person without power three times over... because she recognizes God's presence in the prophet Elijah... and she gives him water... and feeds him... even before she cares for her dying son... and Jesus lifts up Naaman the Syrian... another foreigner who is ritually unclean... yet the prophet Elisha heals and restores him... Jesus names these two outsiders as also being worthy of God's favor...

Theologian Peter Eaton wrote: just a few verses earlier in Luke... when the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness... he was tempted by the Accuser... who wanted him to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple... throw himself down from the *highest and best* that his faith could offer... and now... those in his hometown want to throw him down from the brow of the hill... want to punish him for blasphemy... it is after all an acceptable alternative to stoning... but Satan in the wilderness... and the people of the synagogue were all disarmed by Jesus... and he passed right through their self-serving agendas...

When Jesus says things that please the Nazarenes... he is praised... they like the idea that the messianic age will be theirs... this supports their self-centered focus... it validates their idea of divine favor... that they are God's people... when Jesus says things that displease them... he is attacked... they dislike the idea that what they thought was theirs alone... would be given to the Gentiles... it touches on the emotional energy of racial hatred and survival... and they explode in rage and attempted murder...

Now can you imagine going to a political rally... and having the person who introduces the speaker say that here in this place... scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing... and that Mexicans are worthy of immigration status... and Muslims are worthy to enter this county whenever they like... how do you think the people would hear that... would it be like how the Nazarenes heard Jesus...

The consciousness that creates division is dualistic... and the dualistic mind almost always runs like a computer... processing data so quickly that we think the program is the computer... John Shea wrote... a certain word or event pleases us... another word or event displeases us... we smile... we frown... swinging back-and-forth... back and forth... becoming confused and tired... but we accept this fluctuating inner state as normal... not realizing that anything else is possible... the consciousness that Jesus embodies is unitive... it encompasses... integrates... and redeems all people and all circumstances...

In the life of our Israel... of our country... God's abundance does spill out past American boundaries... of course it does... but do we make contracts or covenants... do we engage in transactions or are we transformed... can we discern which voices promote division and accusation... and which seek to enfold all people... which voices promote exclusivity and which promote inclusivity and bring good news to the poor... can we discern those voices which seek to heal all people... restore all people... feed all people...

Does God bless America... or does God bless all nations... do we think that abundance is for us alone like the Nazarenes did... or can we be transformed by helping to bring God's blessings to even more people... on March 8... at the Catholic Information Center... there's going to be a gathering of faith communities in support of refugees... I invite you to join me... to show our support of the Other... of those in need... after all... the boundaries we've created... the divisions we impose... and sometimes work so hard to enforce... are all invisible to God...

Mike+