

Sermon for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany

“The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned” (Mat 4:16).

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Sickness,
affliction, diseases and pain;

oppression, evil, demons, and fear –

all of these
maladies which are listed in today’s Gospel reading are just some of the
symptoms of the darkness that surrounds us as the consequence of sin.

But God
has not abandoned us to the darkness,

and in the gifts of
Christ crucified and risen, He has kept His promise to shine the Light of His
love on us and to rescue us from the darkness of sin and death.

“The
LORD is my light and my salvation...

The LORD is the stronghold of my life...

He
will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble...

He
will lift me high upon a rock” (Psa 27:1-5)...

And so,

we are confident to pray as we did just moments ago,

“Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon OUR infirmities and stretch forth the hand of Your majesty to heal and defend US;

through Jesus Christ

our Lord. Amen.” (Collect for the 3rd Sunday after Epiphany)

And

wouldn't it be great if Jesus actually *did* come for us today the way He did for those people in Galilee,

gazing upon each and every one of us with His compassion, and healing every disease and every affliction among US?

Well,

the fact is Jesus HAS come for you today!

And as you come

before Him with your afflictions, calling upon Him for His mercy, pleading to Him for His rescue,

He looks upon you

with compassion and supplies His perfect, once-for-all healing [+] which He purchased for you on the cross.

Perhaps

some of you may recall that my favorite word in the New Testament is “splachnizomai” – (you can look up how to spell that in the “Welcome” in the front of your service folder...).

It's

the word that means “compassion” in English.

The word *only* appears in the New Testament,

it *only*

appears in the Gospels,

and
it *only* appears twelve times.

And you know what?

In each and every case, it is used *only* in reference to Jesus to describe what He experiences as He gazes upon our suffering.

Splanchnizomai

is the word that gives us our medical terminology for things related to the gut.

For example, the
splanchnic nerve and splanchnic artery are nerves and arteries that supply the gut.

And really, the word
“splanchnizomai” is best understood as “gut wrenching,”

an experience of
sympathy and pity so deep you experience it from within the depths of your very being.

It is
the word used of Jesus when he poured out His healing on the sick (Matt 14:14), fed the hungry (Matt 15:32), gave sight to the blind (Matt 20:34), cured the leper (Mark 1:47), cast out the demons (Mark 9:22), and raised up the widow’s son from death to life (Luke 7:13).

It is the word used
in three of the parables, including the Good Samaritan who, in His compassion, raised the dying man out of the ditch (Luke 10:33), the Master who, in His compassion, forgave the unpayable debt of a sinner (Matt 18:27), and the loving Father who, in His compassion, received His lost son back with open arms.

And I dare say, it
is the word that could be used today to describe how Jesus feels as He looks upon you...

Recently,
I’ve had opportunity to share with a couple of you the story of my return to

the MD Anderson Cancer Center to follow-up a tumor that I had operated on.

I was one among
thousands who visited there that day,

and we all had one
thing in common –

We
had all received a death-sentence from cancer,

and so we were all
there seeking a full pardon, or at the very least, a stay of execution!

After
parking in the garage,

I made my way down
the elevator to the 3rd floor where a skybridge connects the garage
with one of the main buildings.

And as
I turned out of the elevator and started through the glass doors leading onto
the skywalk,

I remember my feet stopping and my heart breaking...

The tears
immediately began to fill my eyes and a terrible sadness welled up from deep
within my gut as I came face to face with the sheer enormity of human
suffering.

On
either side of the skywalk were all these people, and they all had the same
look- not really pain,

not even despair,

but
rather, just worn out, used up... In a word, dying.

Their

hair was patchy or falling out, their skin was pale except where there were radiation burns, their eyes were sunken and their gazes were unfocused.

All manner of

bandages and appliances were holding pieces of their faces, heads, and necks together,

and unlike you and

me who can actually hold the weight of our heads up this morning, almost every one of them sat slumped or curled up in a chair or wheelchair,

holding the weight

of their head in their hand or simply slouching forward under a blanket. And it was quiet...

And as

I stood there at the edge of this valley of the shadow of death,

I was gripped by a feeling of gut-wrenching pity and sympathy,

the sense of

overwhelming compassion in the face of so much suffering -

the very thing that

Jesus feels when He looks out over you and me today...

For

Jesus looks out over this nave today and He sees what I saw at that hospital.

He sees the wages of sin on full display, the burden of the curse,

the pain, the

suffering, even the death which must finally come for us all.

He

looks out over this valley of the shadow of darkness,

and His gut heaves with compassion -

which
is why He has come for us...

In our
Gospel reading this morning, we find Jesus beginning His gracious rule and
reign for the life of the world -

a reign of grace and
mercy in which He pours out His gifts for our healing and new life.

"Repent,"
He says, "for the kingdom of heaven IS at hand" (Matt 4:17).

And by this, He
means, "Acknowledge your condition, admit your helplessness,

and
rejoice that God's salvation has come for you!"

For
that great Light of God's saving glory has indeed broken the darkness,

and "upon all those
dwelling in the region and shadow of death," you and me included,

on
us "a light has dawned" (Matt 4:16; Isa 9:2).

In
Christ crucified and risen, the curse is reversed.

Death is utterly defeated.

And there is now no
condemnation for all who simply acknowledge their helplessness and come before
the King to receive the gifts He gives.

Our
Lord preached this Good News everywhere He went.

He also began calling

men into the ministry who would continue this work of His kingdom –

the work of

compassionate healing that continues to this day as He sends the demons packing, reverses the curse,

and

sets you free to a whole new life.

He gave

us a glimpse of this new life in those miraculous signs He performed throughout His ministry –

those healing

miracles that point to THE miracle, THE resurrection to life everlasting that will soon be ours through our Baptism into Christ.

Indeed,

every healing that we experience is an ongoing testimony to this promise.

For whether you are

cured of cancer, cured of a runny nose, or simply open your eyes in the morning to take your first breath of a new day,

these are all signs

that point to that *perfect* healing which Jesus has poured out for you from His cross.

And as

you take and eat the medicine of immortality poured out for you here today, you may rest assured of your healing.

For on YOU a Light has dawned.

Your

King has come.

His

kingdom and salvation ARE at hand.

And you are indeed

receiving His perfect healing for life everlasting.

In
the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Preached by Pastor Holowach

Sermon Text: Matthew 4:12-25