

St. Paul: On The Same page

01.12.14 Epiphany 2a

Day One: Isaiah 49:1-7

Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name... "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

180,497. That's about how many islands there are in the world. Islands are a symbol of remoteness – being cut off from all else. To be marooned on an island is the ultimate abandonment. When we feel alone and cut off from other people, we feel like we are on a desert island. So the Beatles sang, "I am a rock. I am an island," about a lost love.

In a recent movie, a man who was washed up on an island started talking to a volleyball he called Wilson. He created a companion, just as people have created false gods to trust in. But Wilson cannot hear us or help us.

"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."

Psalm 19:7-8

We were each alone – deserted. We were cut off by our sin. But God sent his Son to rescue us. He came not just to the people of Israel, but even to the distant nations and the far off islands. There was no place too remote for God's salvation to reach. There was no person so isolated that God did not see and desire to bring to himself.

Tom Hanks talked to a volleyball. Who can you turn to for companionship? You have a Savior who knows where you live.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I am not alone. Thank God I am not alone. I am never alone. Whatever distant shore finds my footprints today, Lord let yours be there too. Amen.*

Day Two

Second Reading: 1 Cor 1:1-9

⁴ *I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.* ⁵ *For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—* ⁶ *God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.*

There are a lot of phrases that we use out of politeness but don't always mean. We ask, "How are you," but don't really want to hear the answer. We say, "I'll pray for you," and then we don't do it. Can you think of others?

Paul said that he was thankful for the believers in Corinth, even though many of them were difficult, complaining, rude, and even indecent. Do you suppose he really did thank God for them, even though they caused him so much trouble?

This phrase was not written until centuries after Paul, but it summarizes his teaching well. Luther described us as "simil iustus et peccatore." It means that we are, at the same time, both sinners and saints.

Paul knew that about his congregation. They were

certainly sinners, and hard to endure at times. They complained and fought and fussed and failed. But they were also saints. They had received the grace of God. They had been "enriched in every way" by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Oh sure, they still sinned, just like you do, and every member of every church. That's why congregations are such a mess. But Paul knew and was thankful for the gifts which God had given them, even if they did not always use them well.

Who do you find it hard to be thankful for? Is there someone that you would be tempted to ask God to remove from your life? Perhaps you should give thanks for that person most, for in them we see God's patience, his grace, and his forgiveness – the gifts we need so much!

Prayer: *O Lord, it's hard for me to be thankful for this person. I get along with most people, but this one severely tries my patience. Thank you for that lesson. Help me to learn from this person whom you love. Let me learn patience, and remind me of how patient you have been with me. Amen.*

Day Three

Gospel: John 1:29-42a

²⁹ *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ... ⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.*

We don’t know much about the Apostle Andrew. He didn’t walk on water like Peter. He wasn’t “the disciple whom Jesus loved” like John. He didn’t write any New Testament books or letters. He didn’t even deny or betray Jesus and so get some attention in a negative way!

But Andrew is a wonderful example. He did only 3 simple things. He heard the message. He told his brother. And he brought him to Jesus.

Read through that short list again. Are any of them difficult? Are any of them something that you could not manage to do?

And yet, think of the difference he made by these

simple actions. He brought Peter, who would later lead many thousands to Jesus, to know his Savior.

God does not ask great deeds of you. He only asks that you listen to the message – come to worship – read the Scriptures. He asks that you tell those he has given you to tell. There they are in your home or workplace! And he asks you to bring them. Don’t just urge them to come. Bring them yourself. Make it easier for them to come by coming with them. Imagine what a difference that might make!

If it makes a difference in only one life, that is a person who will live forever and ever as a result of knowing the Savior.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, send your Holy Spirit to me, just as he came upon Andrew. Let me hear, tell, and lead someone to you. Amen.*

Day Four

Psalm 19:7-8

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

At the start of a new year many people are making plans and looking for wisdom. But what does it mean to be wise? People look for a wise person to give them advice, but there are really 3 kinds of advice they might look for:

1. To be told what is right and what is wrong.
2. To be told what will work to achieve their goal.
3. To be told that they are right and others are not.

Sadly, most people look for the 3rd kind of “wisdom.” Wives want a counselor to correct their husband, and vice versa. Laborers want an arbitrator to correct their boss. We all want someone to correct those who are telling us what to do or how to live. It is easiest for us to see the faults and errors of others than to see our own.

The 2nd type of wisdom is better. We all want to reach

our goals in the new year. We went to make money, to make friends, or to make a difference. But what use is an efficient way of reaching a goal if the goal itself might be wrong?

Only the first kind of wisdom is real wisdom, to know what is right and what is wrong. People think it is so easy. They all seem to know automatically what is right – or who is right. And few want to hear correction when they are wrong.

The least favorite advice is what God’s Word offers best. God’s Word reveals what is right, what is best, and what is true. His “law,” his holy word, is perfect. It revives your soul as you discover God’s will for your life. It makes a foolish person wise. It rejoices the heart to discover the right path.

How will you search God’s word this year?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I know your word is true. Now help me to listen and follow it. Amen.