

# Epiphany 4

## Morning Prayer A

First Lesson: Isa 61

Second Lesson: Luke 4:16-32

## Homily

Lord, Liar, or lunatic.

C. S. Lewis famously said  
that these are the only choices one has  
when one confronts Jesus Christ.

Those who would present Him as a great teacher,  
or as a splendid moral example  
have missed the point entirely.

They are choosing to ignore  
the extraordinary claims He made about Himself.

A great teacher doesn't teach lies  
about himself, does he?

Would you consider a teacher to be great  
if the central part of his message is false?

A moral example doesn't live a lie, does he?

You wouldn't consider him very moral if he did.

Jesus made big claims,  
and He made them on His own authority.  
We'll see that as we consider today's Lessons.  
There are only three things to be said

about someone who claims what He claimed.  
Either he's telling the truth,  
and thus is Lord, and must be heard,  
and followed,  
or he is lying through his teeth,  
attempting to fool us all,  
and should be avoided at all costs;  
or, if he really believes what He's saying,  
and it isn't true, well, then,  
he's nuttier than a fruitcake,  
and we ought to steer clear of him.  
Those are the only choices we have.

St. Luke gives us an engaging description  
of Jesus at a worship service.  
He was in His hometown of Nazareth.  
As He was a wandering teacher  
with a band of disciples,  
it was only natural that the elders should  
invite him to say a few words from the Scripture.  
That was the custom,  
and it was good manners.  
He took His place and unrolled the scroll  
to the very reading from Isaiah  
that we heard this morning

*“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me;  
because the LORD hath anointed me*

*to preach good tidings unto the meek;  
he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and the opening of the prison to them that are  
bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the  
LORD, ...”*

At least as much as we heard today  
would have been read in that service,  
and Jesus reread it,  
looked boldly at the congregation, and said:

*“This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.”*

Whoops!  
Did you hear that?  
The preacher read Scripture,  
and applied it to himself!  
Whoa!  
That can't be right, can it?  
Well, not if it's not true, it can't.

And He talked on  
-- about Himself,  
mentioning prophet after prophet,  
and claiming to be greater than all of them.  
What would you have thought?

If He were not all that He claimed to be,  
would you have taken him as a great teacher?  
Would you have listened to what He had to say?  
Or would you have reacted like they did?  
You see,  
if they were right in rejecting those claims,  
they were right in rejecting Him altogether,  
in reacting with anger,  
in trying to get rid of Him,  
even in trying to kill Him,  
which the Law at that time called for  
in such cases.  
And that is just what they did.  
But He slipped away and showed up  
in the synagogue at Capernaum,  
and preached there,  
probably in the same way,  
probably with the same message,  
certainly with uncomfortable boldness,  
and the reaction was a bit different.

*“And they were astonished at his doctrine:  
for his word was with power.”*

Was there less power at Nazareth?  
That seems very unlikely.  
It was the same preacher and the same message.  
There could not have been much more boldness

than that sermon at Nazareth.

What was the difference?

The folk at Capernaum were hungry  
to hear from God,  
not curious to hear a homeboy preach.  
They heard the Word of God speaking to them.  
Undoubtedly they failed to understand most of it,  
but they recognized from whence it came,  
and they felt the power that was in it.

In short, they accepted Him,  
and therefore accepted His words  
They saw the Lord,  
not, as did the folks in Nazareth,  
one who was either liar or lunatic.

As St. Paul said,  
We preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified,  
the incarnate Son of God who died and rose again,  
the One who Himself  
IS the Way and the Truth and the Life.  
We are not preaching the message He taught  
so much as the Message He is.

It's not really our job to teach morality.  
Christian ethics is not the heart of the message.  
Our burden is not to get people to keep the Law.

Oh, none of that is unimportant.

St. Paul said that the Law is a schoolmaster.

to teach us that we need Christ.

If we truly love Him we will want to follow Him,  
to do as He asks of us,

but we can't keep the law well enough  
to earn salvation.

We fail, and fail very badly sometimes.,  
and so does the world around us.

Do we get upset at all the evil we see?

Well, we should.

Are we surprised?

We shouldn't be.

Do we think we can force people to be good?

That won't work.

Law, morality, ethics, these are all important,  
but they don't save.

Good government doesn't save.

Politics doesn't save.

The very best rules fall short of saving,

but Jesus does indeed save

those who come to Him.

Are we preaching mere rules in our daily life?

Are we giving the impression that

if you're good enough you get to Heaven?

Or are we introducing a sinful world to Jesus Christ?

Let us pray:

Blessed Lord, who hast given Holy Scripture to speak of the Christ, and hast called us by it to the Way of salvation; Grant that our hearts and our minds may be so filled with His love shown forth on the Cross, that we may walk with Him in holiness and righteousness, and that our lips and our lives may testify of Him, who is the Way and the Truth and the Life, even Jesus Christ, thine only Son our Lord. Amen.

## **Epiphany 4**

### **Morning Prayer B**

First Lesson: Deut 4:5-13, 32-40

Second Lesson: James 2:1-13

### **Homily to be written**

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## **Epiphany 4**

### **Evening Prayer A**

First Lesson: Isa 45:20-25

Second Lesson: John 2:13-25

### **Homily to be written**

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## **Epiphany 4**

### **Evening Prayer B**

First Lesson: Isa 54:1-8

Second Lesson: Romans 14:1-15:3

### **Homily to be written**