

WORSHIP NOTES

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany • February 5, 2012

The Season

In this season we are reminded of our baptismal identity and the light of Christ shining in the world. These themes led us first to Jesus' baptism and then to readings about God's call. Now in the latter half of the season, we turn to another side of the message. We are witnesses to a ministry that cannot be contained. It reaches out from a home, to the "whole town," and to "all of Galilee." The Good News is for all sorts of people, with all sorts of experiences, in all sorts of places . . .

Today we commemorate the Martyrs of Japan, twenty-six missionaries and converts, killed by crucifixion in 1597. The Christian faith was introduced in Japan by Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries in the sixteenth century. It is estimated that there were as many as 300,000 Christians by the end of the century. Rivalries among different groups of missionaries, political difficulty between Spanish and Portuguese governments, along with factions in the Japanese government led to a suppression of Christianity, and by 1630 the Church in Japan had gone underground. It would be 250 years before Christian missionaries returned, but when they did they found a community of Japanese Christians that had survived all those years.

In Word . . .

There is hope and healing in our texts this week: "Strength to the weary" from our Isaiah text; "healing the brokenhearted" from our Psalm; and the healing of Simon's mother-in-law and others in our Gospel. Last week's gospel showed Jesus' authority and power to cast out demons, and today we have a scene that shows Jesus' power to heal bodily illness. Both episodes demonstrate the universal reach and scope of God's activity embodied in Jesus. The fast moving first chapter of Mark shows God establishing the beginning of his kingdom on earth in the person and work of his Son, Jesus, a kingdom that begins among the broken and marginalized. It is an enduring challenge for the contemporary church. The good news of God in Jesus Christ is intended to set us all free from everything that blocks our ability to "get up and go" into the kingdom of God in our time. This means focusing on our own reach, attending prayerfully to the scope of our gifts and skills, using the fruit of our life and labor to assist in God's liberating work . . . The Epiphany light shines on our paths so that we can be a light to the world. . .

And Song . . .

Traditional (9:00)

"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" is a well known hymn of adoration and praise based on many passages from the Psalms. It was written by Joachin Neander and published in 1680. The text in our hymnal was translated by Catherine Winkworth (four of the original five verses) and first published in *The Chorale Book for England* in 1863. The tune, LOBE DEN HERREN, most likely originated as a folk tune, and combines with this text to create a joyful hymn of praise.

Contemporary (10:30)

Our song of the day, "You Are Mine," is by Minnesota composer and author, David Haas. Haas resides in Eagan, where he is director of The Emmaus Center for Music, Prayer, and Ministry and Campus Minister/Artist-in-Residence at Benilde-St. Margaret's School in St. Louis Park, where he teaches in the music and theology departments. He has produced more than 45 collections of original music, and his liturgical works appear in the hymnals of many denominations. "You Are Mine" with its strong reference to call as well as verses that proclaim the healing power of God picks up themes in today's Gospel.