

3 Epiphany January 26, 2020

In the name of God, who in Jesus
taught us the meaning of unconditional Love.
Amen.

Sermon by The Rev. Deena M. Galantowicz

We are now in the midst of our Epiphany Season, the season of light, or enlightenment, the season which began on the 12th day of Christmas, or Epiphany, the day when the Bible story says the wise men found Jesus, they had an epiphany; they were awakened, enlightened. And now in each of today's scripture readings, people have their eyes opened to something they had not seen before.

In the first reading from Isaiah there has been a real breakthrough in the life of Israel. The people who had walked in darkness have seen a great light; the darkness of oppression is being lifted.

And in the psalm, the writer realizes how much God means to him as the center of his life.

In the second reading from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, Paul exhorts the community to move **out** of the darkness of divisions and **into** the light of unity.

In the Gospel which we just heard, as Jesus walks around Galilee, he becomes a **new** focus for people's lives. It is as if a new light is beckoning to the people: the light of Christ; the Love of God manifested in Christ. Albert Schweitzer put it beautifully in this statement which he named "*The Call of Christ*".

He comes to us as one unknown, as of old, by the lakeside, he came to those men who knew him not. He speaks to us the same words: "Come, Follow Me!" and sets us to the task which he has for us, in our time. He commands. And to those who obey him, whether they be wise or simple, he will reveal himself... in the toils, the sufferings... and the joys which they will know in his fellowship. And, as an ineffable mystery, they will learn, in their own experience, who he is.

If we truly are followers and not just fans of Jesus, we will have a keen sense of his mission and what he is calling us to do. ///// So... let us today consider the words Jesus said when he called his disciples, long ago... and still today. He said simply, "Come, follow me ... and I will make you fishers of men...fishers of people." This is a key moment in the Gospel story. The simplicity of Matthew's telling makes it all the more vivid for us. And this is important, because it is necessary that we make this story ours. It is not merely about an invitation given in a long-ago world to long- ago faces and voices. WE are the faces and voices who today receive this invitation. //// Many of us may feel like saying, "But I do follow him...well at least I try to". But it is easy to forget that the invitation has two parts. "Follow me" AND "I will make you fishers of people." We are called to follow the ways of Jesus and his commandments of Love. But, we are

also called to be prepared to express to others the difference the light of Christ's love makes in our lives.

Let's drop back to the Old Testament times. Let us consider now, the connection between seeing the light, ... that is, being Christ followers, Christians, ... and speaking about or claiming the difference that light makes. The difference between seeing the light and speaking about that light. In the Old Testament world in which the prophets were active, they were among the most powerful persons around. The first king of Israel, Saul, could not have ascended to the throne without the approval of the prophet Samuel. Later, when Saul had strayed away from following the commandments of the Lord, it was Samuel again who was able to engineer King Saul's downfall and to put David on the throne. Still later, at the conclusion of King David's reign, it was the prophet Nathan who was the determining factor in David's decision to make Solomon his successor. Prophets in the past were persons of great influence, full of God's power, highly valued.

But think of it now, in our world today, I think, we as Christians are still called to be a prophetic voice, the voice for instance which sounds the alarm against injustice, the voice which proclaims the necessity for compassion in all our interactions, the voice that calls out for mercy and forgiveness./// It would be a terrible loss if that voice were not heard in our times, either because of fear or because those voices are silenced. To be truly prophetic is to shed light ... and truth. especially where maliciousness and evil exist. To be prophetic WILL shed light and truth and to be silent will simply guarantee darkness. To shed light... OR to let darkness prevail is our decision, since we as the body of Christ have inherited the prophetic mantle on our own shoulders. In this world of ours, this our fragile earth, our island home, as our Eucharistic Prayer C says, darkness abounds in such proportions that it can be scary. Threats to world peace, bigotry and racism, a decline in moral standards, lies in relationships, in families, some not much different from the dissensions and darkness of old times. There is hardly a community in our great and prosperous nation in which we cannot find homeless and hungry people. These evils, and so many others, strengthen the powers of darkness. They hide and stifle the light of Christ.

The image of LIGHT is probably one of Christianity's greatest symbols. The light of Christ; the light of the world; the brightness of the star over Bethlehem. If we hold Christ - his joy - his teachings - his love - in our hearts and minds, the light will shine to others through us. The gospel, the Good News, IS the light, and the living of the Gospel, of taking it seriously, is evidenced by the light we shine. We become conveyors of the light of Christ...of its positive energy...as we share it with others. //// We have been commanded to let our light shine in such a way that those who see it may see God's light AND be drawn to it, and therefore, away from the powers of darkness. WE are not the light, but we are bearers of the light. What a privilege when you think of it!

Mary was called "Theotokis", which means "carrier or bearer of God" or "Christ-bearer"; WE are called to be bearers of the LIGHT of Christ. We are called to show the ways of the LIGHT that Jesus was able to shine ... to manifest that light of kindness, that light of Love and goodness and tolerance in our interactions with others, to be aware of that LIGHT in our decision-making, in our willingness to turn the other cheek, and certainly in our efforts to quell the sin of pride.

Perhaps if we were to pause for a few moments, each of us could call to mind someone in our lives, perhaps even here in our church, who truly does radiate LOVE and the gentle essence of the Light of God in Christ.

Revelation is Light revealed. It shows all the imperfections. So in many ways light can be threatening precisely because it is revealing. It exposes. It is truth. And that is precisely what Epiphany is all about...God revealing to us, showing us how God wants us to live, how God wants this world to be. //// Herod wanted the light of Jesus put out. Others do too, from then until now.

Sometimes WE too are afraid of what light shined on our lives might do, and so we hide. We hide from the revelation it can bring. We don't want change; we don't want everything laid bare to that piercing light.

Today's Gospel speaks of light in the familiar words of Advent. "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light." That image of light is really always with us. We are aware of it every time we light a candle. We place stained glass windows in our churches to catch and to diffuse the light; we decorate with lights and candles. We are basically people of the light...children of light...or at least that is God's intention for us.

This season of Epiphany is a great time for us to examine our lives honestly...to ask ourselves: How much would we like to have the truth of light reveal? Do we really want to...or need to...continue to have areas of darkness where we would dread to have light shine?/// Jesus not only invites us to walk as a child of the light, but moreover, he wants us to let His light so shine through US that others will be drawn to him and his ways of truth, freedom, love and light. Our light will then indeed catch other people. We WILL be "fishers of people."

Whether or not to bask in the light of Christ, indeed to let it shine forth for others who also need that LIGHT...OR to allow darkness to remain - is our decision.///// For you and for me, may the light of Christ shine in our hearts more and more, and be a light to enlighten our thinking and to guide our decisions and our actions. Indeed, may that light so shine that others will see that light and be drawn to Jesus Christ, the light of the world. ///// As John the Baptist said: We are NOT that light, but we are called to bear witness to that light. Come. Let us fulfill our high calling to Follow Jesus and to continue the prophecy of old...Christ IS the light of the world. May we be bearers of that light...As Mama Blue and her singers sang for us last Sunday: This little light of mine...I'm gonna' let it shine. This little light of mine...I'm gonna' let it shine! Let it shine! Let it shine.

AMEN