



SUNDAY SERMON

Illumination of Faith

DATE

Epiphany 8
Sunday, March 3, 2019

PREACHER

Jeryl Mitchell

Good Morning Friends! These past three Sundays Jason has shared with us how to read the bible in his three-week Sermon series. A wonderful collection of sound spiritual principles and guidance in having us think and feel freely our journey of understanding. He closed with "Jesus has shown us God's dream for the world. We know the way into God's Kingdom. We know it won't be easy--- for those of us who are rich now, it involves self-denial, emptying out, so that we can be filled with God's truth."

Today, we are ending the season of Epiphany and later this week, Wednesday, we will begin our Lent journey of remembrance and reflection. But before going forward, as sometimes in our lives we need to do, we need to go back first before we can take that next step. We need to examine the recognizable moments of biblical epiphany and celebrate them as our own.

Epiphany starts with the "where" and "when" of Jesus' birth and destiny. After the birth of Jesus, son of God, magi come to pay homage to the King of the Jews and Herod's plans are foiled as Joseph takes the family to Egypt and then to Nazareth. Among the Synoptics only Luke raises the issue of whether John the Baptist was the Messiah. A question used to introduce John the Baptist's preaching about the one to come. The Lucan story of the baptism of Jesus indicates that Jesus is praying and in response the Holy Spirit descends in bodily form. The same Holy Spirit who comes on Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel will come on the Twelve at Pentecost. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

Second epiphany captures the initial Cana Miracle. The Cana scene is "the first of his signs". Jesus replaces the water prescribed for Jewish purification by wine so good that the head waiter wonders why the best has been kept until last. This represents the revelation and wisdom that he brings from God, fulfilling the Old Testament promises of abundance of wine in the messianic days. Included in this story is the Mother of Jesus, who is rebuffed by Jesus on the grounds that his hour had not yet come. Yet, the Mother's persistence that honors Jesus' terms leads him to grant her original request...turning water into wine. The Mother of Jesus will appear at the foot of the cross in John 19 where her incorporation into discipleship will be completed as the Mother of the Beloved Disciple.

continued

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The third and fourth epiphanies capture the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth. The rejection of Jesus in his own native place is included in Luke's account but does not include a rejection of Jesus by his own household or his own relatives. Jesus comments on the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah 61:1-2 reflects the Jubilee-year amnesty for the oppressed, is used to portray Jesus as anointed prophet and is programmatic of what Jesus's ministry will bring about...the Good News of Discipleship.

In the fifth epiphany, Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law and effected a tremendous catch of fish. The call of Simon who confesses himself an unworthy sinner is a dramatic presentation of vocation and prepares the way for a calling of Paul who was also unworthy because he had persecuted Christians. The theme of leaving "everything" to follow Jesus illustrates Luke's stress on detachment from possessions.

The sixth Epiphany...blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. In Luke's reading he has transposed two scenes of Mark, the healing of the multitude and the calling of the Twelve. So, that the twelve are with Jesus he heals "all". Directing the healing to all disciples, not just the twelve.

The seventh epiphany enunciates Jesus' values. Sometimes those values are called "ethics of the kingdom". Hard I know to Love our Enemies...particularly to love those who hate and abuse us. But we can overcome.

So, here we are today, back to where we started...the Last Sunday After the Epiphany. The theme of Jesus' identity is followed out in the subsequent scenes. They begin with the return of the Twelve Apostles and the feeding of the 5000 and end with the healing of a child. The transforming text describes the glory as present already in Jesus' earthly career. Yet it also affirms the suffering aspect of the Son of Man, for Jesus talks to Moses and Elijah about his "exodus"; his departure to God through death in Jerusalem.

Both glory and suffering are affirmed by God's voice that identifies him as Son and Chosen One. As the Beloved Disciple of God, healing the child, when others couldn't, manifests the Majesty of God in Jesus. So how do we manifest our lives in the Majesty of God? How do we do that?

Our lives may or may not have parallels to the Epiphany of season. Mine certainly does...a long corporate career, loss of family, failed relationships, receiving the light, birth and baptism of my daughter Iona, loss of possessions and strongly leaning into my true self as Mother. All part of the majesty of God in my life...including both glory and suffering.

So how do we go forward?

This is a time when the church comes together to focus on the global impact of our call "to seek and serve Christ in all persons". Which of course comes from our Baptismal Covenant in the Book of Common prayer. We are having a Baptism here this morning, in celebration of new life. Jesus' baptism in the Jordan rivers was also in celebration of new life on the Last Day of Epiphany by Christians. As Christians, we are called to reach out across borders, across walls, across divides and to always put family first, our family at home and here at St Columba's, but equally important is our family...the whole of humanity. The Way of Love dispels borders and knows no boundaries. It is important to care for the elderly next-door neighbor and to care for

the poor in our neighborhood. It is equally important to look beyond ourselves, to look beyond our own cultural and geographic context. To care for those who are in desperate economic situations, those living in war zones, those who are victims of famine, victims of oppression, victims of violence, victims of injustice, and the homeless and migrants of the world... on World Mission Sunday.

The transformation that claims the soul, our soul, this Last Day of Epiphany starts with new life, baptized here in our Church. This is a transformation that claims the soul and the spirit. We are beholding by faith the light of Jesus Christ and are changed into his likeness..." his face became different and his raiment became gleaming white." May we know as Jesus did how to inhabit our own skin with grace and purpose.

Closing in prayer...

We light a light

in the name of the God who creates life,

in the name of the Savior who loves life,

in the name of the Spirit who is the fire of life

and we pray for the life of the world on this day. (JPN)

Amen.