

*In the name of God, who makes us, loves us, and keeps us. Amen.*

What is the season of Epiphany about? Isn't it all about the ability to see Christ clearly, with clarity. Mostly that means seeing with the eyes of our hearts, and any vision correction begins there. Each year, following the great gift of Christmas, the gift of God's real presence among us in the person of Jesus, the readings and experiences of Epiphany offer us the opportunity to begin to unwrap that gift and see just what it is. There is an opportunity for revelation, that is, that with fresh inner-sight, we might catch a glimpse of the important things God dreams we will understand. If you have had great epiphanies, great new thoughts about your relationship to God, you might think you have discovered them on your own, that they might be independent discoveries for which you yourself deserve a pat on the back. However, the source of those discoveries is probably the Holy Spirit herself, who, trust me, is always persistently trying to get your attention. If you don't think that you have had any great new revelations yet this year, well, there is still time, there is always time, if you just open the eyes and ears of your hearts to hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

This is the last Sunday after the Epiphany of 2023, which only means that we are now guided by the church calendar into the season of Lent. It doesn't mean, praise God, that we will not continue to have fresh new insights, discoveries, revelations, and "aha!" moments, but it does mean that we now transition into a time when we are encouraged to deliberately focus on the benefits of our latest discoveries. God has given us the gift of Christ; God has given us the Spirit moving among and within us; now, if we have recognized and realized that, if we have received the gifts God so generously and lovingly gives, what shall we do with them. Are there better and more faithful ways we can use them? That is the opportunity Lent, as a specific time in our calendars, is meant to offer us. And we will observe here in this parish a sacred, holy Lent, during which we will help each other focus. Our liturgy of prayer and sacrament will guide us; I will try to do my best here at the pulpit; And meanwhile our scripture lessons will bring us guidance from God's living Word.

Jesus, as you heard in the narrative from Matthew, invites the three fishermen to come along with him to the holy mountain. He apparently wants them to be witnesses, to experience a great and dazzling epiphany as he chats with Moses and Elijah about secret things. The light is so bright they can barely see. And they are astounded by what they see. And then, out of nowhere, with frightening volume and authority, they hear the voice of God the Father saying "This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" The three of them are blown away. They cover their eyes and ears and fall to the ground. But Jesus touches them, he touches them reassuringly. Oh, how we ourselves long for that touch when we are frightened or ill or troubled or in despair. The touch of Jesus. Not just the knowledge of him, not just the literary Gospel character, not just what we have been told by priest after priest all these years, but the actual touch of Jesus. Perhaps that's really what Jesus wanted to be sure Peter, James, and John had experienced. Perhaps that was their real epiphany that day.

Well, what is it exactly that Jesus wants us to see? What does he want us to focus on? What powerful insight does he want us to experience? Is it a blazing light? Is it the booming voice of God? Is it his tender touch when the world terrifies us? I hope you all have some experiences, some

personal experiences, when you have felt Jesus' touch and heard him ask you to open your eyes to his reassurance. I hope you have each had inspiring epiphanies of your own. You may not think they have been exactly dazzling, that they have been transfiguring; you may not think that they are worth writing home about. But they are. They are part of the great Gospel story, the Good News. Sometimes we need to step back to see the larger picture, the clearer vision. The landscape of the holy mountain. And, God willing, that will be one of our Lenten opportunities. I invite and encourage you to reflect on your epiphanies both past and present, those things which have been revealed to you about God's faithfulness, about relationships, about life and resurrection, about forgiveness, about yourself. Gather the data and review it, hold it close to your heart, lift it up in prayer, and as Jesus told the disciples as he touched them after their vision, "Get up, and do not be afraid."

I will share with you one of my own epiphanies. It's not a new one, exactly, but one about which I have been reminded a lot lately. Recent experiences have reinforced my insight that Jesus wants me to see him, and to see him in all with whom I come into contact. There are those with whom I fiercely disagree about some things. There are those whose personalities I find disagreeable, too. There are those with whom I really would rather not spend any time at all. There are those whom I desperately want to "unfriend". Yet I think Jesus has revealed to me that I should look deeper, that I should look for his presence to be revealed even behind their unpleasant manners and beneath all those insufferable layers with which the world has afflicted them. Somewhere deep inside, there is the image of God, just waiting for me to discover and not dis-count. Even those who seem especially unlovable deserve a deeper look, a closer examination. Jesus, I think, wants me to see him behind their eyes. When the three disciples, after being reassured and feeling Jesus' touch, *do* get up from the ground, we hear that they looked up and saw only Jesus standing there, Jesus himself alone.

I hope that you, too, have had a good and fruitful Epiphany season, and that your experiences since the giving of the great Christmas gift have revealed new ideas for you or have reinforced important thoughts God has shared with you before. I hope your sight has been improved, your insight, too. Of course, the opportunity for clarity isn't reserved for one brief period on the calendar...may you find that any and every time is a good time to listen to Jesus. And as we transition now into Lent, I hope you will share your insights with us, that our common jigsaw puzzle, both within and outside its borders, may reveal even more of the larger picture. Lent is a time to be deliberate and to deliberate, to share our dreams and schemes, and to gather in God's name. I hope you will join us often in Lent, and if you can't be with us physically, then to be with us spiritually and prayerfully wherever you are. There are traditions in Lent of 'giving things up', and that may well be helpful, but perhaps the more faithful course during Lent is to actually add things, to add compassion, forgiveness, curiosity, study, piety, action, and of course love. Adding such things intentionally to our behavior can push out those other unfruitful distractions. Lent is a time to gather all the wandering sheep of our thoughts together, lead them through Jesus the sheepgate into the fold, and restore the flock together to deliberate and consider just what Jesus wants us to faithfully do now with all the things he has invited us to witness. I wonder, could that be a transfiguring experience? Amen