

EYES OF LOVE

1/9/22 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA

Epiphany: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7,10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Happy Epiphany! At Epiphany we reflect further on the gift of God incarnating among us, realizing this isn't a one-time gift. It's the gift that keeps giving. As the magi bring gifts to the family of the Christ child, we are pointed toward noticing the God-given gifts in our lives. Along those lines, I want to share an epiphany I had recently.

But, first, I need to make a confession. These two things—my confession and my epiphany—go hand-in-hand, one informing the other. My confession is that I have been squandering the gift of living in this beautiful area of southern California for a number of years, because I became obsessed with the idea that I should be able to afford a two-bedroom home close to my work.

While that may be true in many parts of the country, we all know we make trade-offs to live in paradise. But I lost sight of that. I was so busy trying to solve this dilemma that I seldom enjoyed a walk at the beach or the beauty of the condo I do own. Yeah, it's small, in terms of having only one bedroom, but it's spacious, has great light, and it's in a nice, quiet area, with friendly neighbors. Plus, it's only 10 minutes from the Pacific Ocean! That's a gift!

Just to clarify, my wanting more has nothing to do with how I manage my finances. I tithe 10% of my salary every year back to St. Andrew's. But what I've realized is my intention to tithe was basically happening in a vacuum. Because, on one hand, I feel good about tithing; it's part of my spiritual practice. But on the other hand, I realize I was not being what Scripture calls a "cheerful giver." Instead, I was whining about not being able to afford a bigger place.

That epiphany—that I was squandering the gifts God had given me—sort of evolved over several weeks, as I meditated and prayed, starting with a line in Mother Hannah's sermon several weeks ago about appreciating that I have a home when so many people don't.

This morning's reading from Ephesians illustrates what another author calls "looking at the world through the eyes of love." That's what the Apostle Paul is up to as he explains: "Grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ." The mention of "Gentiles" tells us this news is for everyone—not just the Jews, but also the non-Jews...the Gentiles.

Paul's sense of God's abundance—of seeing the world through the eyes of love—is in direct contrast to how our passage from Matthew describes King Herod. Herod sees the world through a lens of scarcity and fear. When he charges the magi to "go and search diligently," we understand, it's not because he wants to pay homage to the Christ-child as he states. Rather, Herod sees the world through a lens of threat, worrying that somebody more powerful than he might bring down the rule he's established.

The magi, however, like Paul, also take in their world through the eyes of love. We are told: "When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy...and they offered him gifts." In response to God's gracious gift, the magi, and the Apostle Paul, all enter into the human work of spreading that Good News to the world.

Now, before his conversion to Christianity, Paul persecuted Christians, viewing others through the lens of threat. But as part of his conversion, he temporarily experienced blindness. So, when he accepts Christ into his life, Paul, literally, sees the world through new eyes—

through the eyes of love—becoming aware of how God’s grace, mercy and love are plentiful enough for everyone—even him, a guy with a very checkered past!

I’ve been feeling a little Paul since I’ve had my epiphany—like my blindness has been lifted and I can actually see the gifts in my life through the eyes of love. A friend helped me make that shift even further. As I explained what great neighbors I have, but that I hate hearing the noise of their lives beside and above me, she suggested “reframing” my experience.

“What if,” she asked, “you imagine that you live in a big house with your extended family, and that you’re simply hearing the joyful movement of your loved ones all around you?”

That’s what I mean by “seeing the world through the eyes of love”—seeing the splendor of God’s creation all around us, appreciating each other and our ministry together, and remembering we can go to the beach without getting on a plane!

The world won’t be changed in that moment, but the way we see the world will be changed. That’s what the magi, Paul, and Jesus ask us to do—to see the world through God’s eyes...the eyes of love.

So, I challenge you this week, to find something in your life in need of “reframing.” This gift of life is a gift to be thoroughly enjoyed, not squandered as we wish for something more or something else. And it’s a simple first step: simply commit to see the world through the eyes of love.

-AMEN

Collect of the Day:

O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.
Nations shall come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
Lift up your eyes and look around;
they all gather together, they come to you;
your sons shall come from far away,
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.
Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,

because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.
A multitude of camels shall cover you,
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;
all those from Sheba shall come.
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Psalm 72:1-7,10-14

Give the King your justice, O God, *
and your righteousness to the King's Son;
That he may rule your people righteously *
and the poor with justice;
That the mountains may bring prosperity to the people, *
and the little hills bring righteousness.
He shall defend the needy among the people; *
he shall rescue the poor and crush the oppressor.
He shall live as long as the sun and moon endure, *
from one generation to another.
He shall come down like rain upon the mown field, *
like showers that water the earth.
In his time shall the righteous flourish; *
there shall be abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.
The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, *
and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts.
All kings shall bow down before him, *
and all the nations do him service.
For he shall deliver the poor who cries out in distress, *
and the oppressed who has no helper.
He shall have pity on the lowly and poor; *
he shall preserve the lives of the needy.
He shall redeem their lives from oppression and violence, *
and dear shall their blood be in his sight.

Ephesians 3:1-12

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

Matthew 2:1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: `And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.