

Seeing the Light Dale Ramerman, 3rd Sunday after Epiphany Yr A, January 22, 2017

How have you seen the light? I suspect that if I were to ask you to answer that question aloud, we'd hear as many different answers as there are people here.

You might say:

We've passed the shortest day of the year by a few weeks, and can see the light has already changed.

Our mountains have been spectacularly white because of our clear cold light.

I suddenly understood a joke that has always puzzled you.

I saw the pink sunset light on Mt. Baker with the bright full moon rising behind it.

The light I see on our frozen lakes shimmers.

I had an ah-ha moment, seeing someone in an entirely new light.

I finally agree with someone, and they respond that I've finally seen the light.

Or, No, my flashlight has gone missing.

Aah-ha moment, an epiphany: Often one of the joyful events of our lives, and certainly in the Church Calendar.

Our Isaiah reading can be understood to refer to specific historical events in the 8th century before Christ; or as referring to the 6th BC century return from exile; or as asserting that evil will never permanently prevail because God is ultimately in control. Christians have always read this passage as foretelling the birth of Christ and Christ's impact on human kind;. Our ability to see different possible meanings in a passage of scripture gives scripture its richness. The last lines of the reading could not be clearer:

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined

...

For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

In our gospel reading Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, all fishermen, lived in Galilee, the out of the way region settled by two of the lesser tribes of Israel.

They were living in the shadow of death as outsiders from Galilee, lowly fishermen in an oppressive Roman Empire. But as they heard Jesus proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near," the light dawned on them, they had a great ah-ha moment, an epiphany. They saw a great light and the rod of their oppressor was lifted. They left their boats and followed Jesus.

We too, like these four fishermen who became Christ's disciples, are called by God to follow Jesus. With the Psalmist, we can say:

When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh,
it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who
stumbled and fell.

Though an army should encamp against me,
yet my heart shall not be afraid;

And though war should rise up against me,
yet will I put my trust in him.

The Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians speaks of the epiphany to come:

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part;
then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

The Christian message is that we can have our epiphany now and have an even greater epiphany
when the dead in Christ are raised.

Last week, as the recessional hymn, we sang a song written by a woman, Singar Sundar Singh, in South India during the time that the Christian church was enduring great persecution. Families were driven from their homes because of their Christian faith, and as they fled, one man leaving with his family was heard saying, over and over, I have decided to follow Jesus. Ms. Singh wrote a hymn based on these words.

I have decided to follow Jesus
I have decided to follow Jesus,
No turning back, no turning back.

Though no one join me still I will follow...

The world behind me the cross before me...

God's light shines for each of us and calls us to respond by following Jesus.

Dale Ramerman
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