

Sermon Epiphany III Year A 2017

Isaiah 9:1-4

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-23

Psalm 27:1, 5-13

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Epiphany is known as a season of light and joy.

The promise to bring light into our darkness is just one of the promises that God has made throughout history. “God has a history of promises made to the people of God. One of them is found in our reading from Isaiah 9. God promises light in our darkness, freedom from our bondage, joy instead of our sorrow. And the God of biblical history always keeps God’s word.” (Achtmeier p. 61). Isaiah promised the coming of the light to those who dwelt in deep darkness. Upon the birth of Jesus, the people of God understood this scripture to be fulfilled. With the birth of Jesus people began to reexamine the scriptures looking for hints of the one who had come. During this season of Epiphany we celebrate the joy and light that Jesus brings into the world.

Our Gospel lesson continues the story of Jesus inviting others into ministry. Last week, we heard Jesus invite two of John the Baptist’s disciples to follow him with the invitation, “come and see.” This Sunday, we have moved to Matthew’s gospel where Jesus began recruiting followers from an unlikely group, from commercial fisherman no less. Jesus invites them and much to our astonishment, they drop everything and follow Jesus. This seems unimaginable to us. But I suspect that is because we don’t hang out with the commercial fishing crowd. I know something of them, because one of my three brothers was a commercial fisherman. They don’t tend to follow the track in life that most of us have

followed. My father might have said they weren't exactly the top of the barrel. Yet, Jesus chose them.

From an unlikely source, disciples were recruited then trained and commissioned. Their work bore fruit and it continues to bear fruit today. We are the inheritors of this tradition of invitation. We aren't to judge. Just invite. Extend the invitation. "Will you come and follow me," says our Sequence hymn. Give us a try. Because here we meet Jesus. A Spirit that accompanies us each and every day, offering love, support, suggestions, acceptance, and guidance. Empowered by faith, we can do wonders. That is what the earliest disciples discovered. Disciples are discovering this in our day as well.

When the gift of faith, of following Jesus blossoms in our lives, it has the power to transform us. Then we radiate the joy and light of Jesus for the world around us.

I want to share a story of someone whose faith made his life radiate light and joy despite the cards that life had dealt him. This is a fishing story. I knew him as Uncle Kinlaw, though he was Sallie's uncle Kinlaw. Kinlaw lived just up the road from Sallie's parents. Any trip to see Sallie's family took us past Uncle Kinlaw's house. The family all lived close to one another. More than likely, as you drove by you would see Kinlaw in the driveway walking. Kinlaw walked with a cane, a white cane with a red tip. As he walked he would tap from side to side. Walking a perfect straight line along the side of the driveway. Kinlaw lived in darkness from before the time that I knew him when he was in his late 70's. He lost his vision as a complication of diabetes. Yet Kinlaw did not let blindness overcome him. Kinlaw walked with a cane. He knew how long his driveway was and so he did lap after lap from his house out to the road.

Kinlaw was a very pleasant person, a faithful Episcopalian and gentleman if there ever was one. His most frequent greeting was to call you "governor." "Well,

governor it is great to see you,” he would say. Kinlaw never acted as if he couldn’t see us when we talked. Kinlaw spoke from the ancient biblical understanding of the word “see.” In scripture to see is to know. To be in conversation with Kinlaw was to know Kinlaw, just as he knew you. Vision was not essential to Kinlaw’s knowing, his seeing.

Uncle Kinlaw was a fisherman. Not of the commercial variety like my brother and the disciples, but an avid sportsman no less. Amazingly, the loss of his eye sight had not limited his fishing. The family farm in the country contained a 125 acre lake and they only allowed fly fishing on the lake. Kinlaw was an avid fly fisherman. One day my brother Chris was visiting. He is another avid fisherman also not of the commercial variety. Chris was visiting and Kinlaw invited us to go fishing at the lake. Chris and I picked up Kinlaw early one morning and drove to the farm. At the rustic camp, Kinlaw changed into his fishing gear complete with fly fishing vest, flies, and fly rod. He emerged from the camp, and headed to the boat shed where the canoe was tied up. Kinlaw eased himself into the front of the canoe and I got in the back with the paddle. We pushed off and I paddled along the shore while Kinlaw sat up front fly rod in hand. “How far are we from the shore, Governor?” he asked. “About 20 feet,” I said. Kinlaw stripped off some line from the reel and began to swing the pole back and forth over his head, finally letting the line go. The line landed about 18 inches from shore. He waited and twitched the line. If he heard nothing he would pull it back and send it flying forward again as I slowly paddled around the edge of the lake.

If he got a strike he would set the hook quickly. Alas, he would only be able to hook about every other strike. He regretted that he missed the others but since he could not see the fish striking, he had to rely on the sound of the strike before he

could respond. That short delay allowed some fish to spit the fly and move on. The missed fish did not impact him though, Kinlaw was just happy fishing.

After a while he reeled in his line and said, “Pass me the paddle, governor.” “It is my turn to paddle while you fish.” I passed him the paddle and sitting forward in the front of the canoe he paddled gently and slowly keeping us amazingly on a line parallel with the shore. I fished, he paddled. After a while he said, “Take me to shore and I will fish from shore while you and your brother fish from the canoe.” So I took him ashore and he fished by himself while we paddled around the lake. Kinlaw was happy with a smile on his face the whole day. The experience was amazing and my brother and I both knew that we had been in the presence of the holy. He thanked us immensely for taking him, when in reality he was the one who had taken us. Kinlaw was a man of deep faith whose life exuded the joy and light of Christ. The darkness of vision simply could not overcome the light of Christ that radiated from him. Kinlaw’s faith and love of God illuminated the path of his life. Coming to know Jesus can have that effect upon a person.

We have good news to share with the world. We come to know this as we come to experience Jesus as a part of our lives. As we experience the hope that Jesus offers, we come to know his light in our lives each day. We become disciples of Jesus and we in turn do what disciples do. We invite and welcome.

Jesus began his ministry inviting others to follow him. The invitation from Jesus still stands. Those of us who have chosen to follow are the ones to continue to spread the movement from here. You and I have an experience of love and acceptance, of giftedness and accompaniment to share. We are to invite others to follow us. The invitation can be open and straightforward. Come join us for worship on Sunday. Or come join us at Mardi Gras celebration. Or come join us for our Lenten program. Or come to the neighborhood picnic on Pentecost or the

services of Holy Week and Easter. Or join us in the greenhouse at Lynchburg Grows, or as we serve dinners at the Yoder Center or the Gateway.

But it all begins with the invitation. Follow me. Follow me to St. John's to any number of events or ministries. There are lots of ways to connect and we are looking to develop new ones all the time. Do you have an idea for a ministry, something you want to get started? Well, just let us know. This may be the Holy Spirit working through you to bring new opportunities to (St. John's and) this faith community.

Now, here at St. John's, we aren't the only way. We aren't the best way. But we are one way. One way to come to know Jesus. Knowing Jesus, we in turn invite others.

You may remember the movie, "Bucket List." The lead characters are played by Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson. The character Carter is played by Morgan Freeman. At one philosophical point, Carter tells Jack Nicholson that some religious traditions believe that when we get to heaven we will be asked just two questions. "Have you experienced joy in your life?" and "Have you allowed others to experience joy?"

The light of Christ's love was the source of Kinlaw's joy and strength. And Kinlaw shared that joy with every person that he was fortunate to know. To experience his joy and faith was transformative.

Over the course of our lives, we become disciples as well. And we have joy and light to share with the world. We do that by inviting others to join us on the journey. As the hymn says, "Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know and **never be the same?**"