

February 4, 2024 Fifth Sunday of Epiphany

Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church

Matthew 2:1-11 Mark 1:29-39

"Epiphany: Gifted with Healing"

Douglas T. King

I am a different person depending upon the company with whom I find myself. If I am spending the evening with my friend Ted I am a person who will descend easily into silliness and laughter to the point of tears. If I am with my Uncle Hugh, now in his nineties, I am a storyteller recounting the family yarns from years gone by. Ask me sometime about the great biscuit-throwing incident of Thanksgiving 1978. If I am spending the day with my friend Margaret, I am a curious thinker exploring the deepest of theological and philosophical inquiries.

I am not alone in this reality. Different facets of who we are, are accentuated depending on with whom we are spending our time. Fifteen minutes after arriving at a college reunion and you find yourself acting as if you were twenty again.

Today is the third in our sermon series on the season of epiphany exploring the nature of our encounters with the divine in whose company we always are. In the first two weeks we learned of how every encounter with God includes an invitation and how every encounter with God brings us in close proximity to the divine's immense power.

As we continue to work through the lectionary readings in the gospel of Mark we hear of Jesus visiting the house of Simon and Andrew and on from there to throughout Galilee. So what does this text have to teach us about who we are when we are in the

presence of Jesus Christ, when we are having an epiphanic moment? Jesus enters the house of Simon and Andrew and Simon's mother-in-law is healed. Just by touching her hand she was up and out of bed, fully restored, and serving one and all. Soon the entire town was at their door and so many were cured and freed from their demons. The next morning Jesus retreats from the crowds, and after a time of quiet and prayer, the healing continues. Jesus makes the rounds throughout Galilee, restoring people. The healings are happening so abundantly it is as if just being in Jesus' general vicinity brings healing. In the fifth chapter of Mark a woman is healed by merely touching the hem of Jesus' garment. Being in contact with Jesus offers healing and wholeness and restoration, freedom from what binds us up and drags us down. When we recognize we are in the presence of Jesus we are people on the path to healing and wholeness.

Every time we recognize God's presence in our midst, every epiphanic moment, offers us three things. We are invited to live in a new way. We are brought into proximity with God's power. And we are offered healing and wholeness.

Our first scripture reading this morning was the traditional Matthew text for epiphany that is read in early January. It is often the only narrative that comes to mind when we think of epiphany. I am struck by how it is nearly a mirror image of the conversation we have been having about the season of epiphany. In Matthew the three magi come in search of Jesus. In our conversation, Jesus comes in search of disciples, of us. In Matthew the magi bring three gifts to the newborn son of God. In our conversation, it is the divine that brings us three gifts, an invitation, proximity to great power, and healing. What can match up exactly for all of us is that overwhelming joy

the magi experienced when that star brought them before the presence of the divine.

There are two high profile liturgical seasons in our church calendar, advent and lent. As I have told you, I am proposing we raise the profile of the Sundays of Epiphany into a season. We value advent because it invites us to prepare for Christ's arrival in our midst. We value Lent because we are called to journey with Jesus to the cross and then on to resurrection. In this season that falls between the two of those we are called to celebrate those moments when we experience the presence of God in our lives. They may be moments of stillness and quiet when you sense the loving presence of God. They may be revelatory moments when your heart and mind see the world in a brand new way. They may be moments in the midst of crisis when a calm coolness settles over your fevered panic and it is as if the divine has placed their healing hand upon your shoulder.

I cannot begin to name all of the possible ways we experience the divine. Epiphanic moments, come in more shapes and sizes than our imaginations can possibly conceive. Your experiences will not match my experiences. And there may be some of us sitting here who believe they have not had such experiences. I believe you have had them, you just have not recognized those experiences for what they are. If we allowed ourselves to be truly tuned to the movement of God in our midst our days would be filled with epiphanic moments.

We could use a season when we celebrate and watch closely for such experiences. I have even pondered what the liturgical color may be. Advent has royal blue. Christmas has white. Lent has purple. Pentecost, red. What color for epiphany? What color for epiphany? Okay, I do have an idea. Let's see what

you think. How about a raucous cacophony of every color of the spectrum? Perhaps something that resembled a crazy quilt or the work of Jackson Pollack, or a rainbow.

We have discussed how epiphanic moments come in an unmeasurable variety and occur across the spectrum of our entire human experience. What better color to represent that than every color on the spectrum? It would be an acknowledgment that every experience we have includes God's presence whether we are aware of it or not. The ROYGBIV color spectrum also serves to remind us that there are colors beyond our ability to see, infrared and ultraviolet colors. The rainbow of the ROYGBIV spectrum reminds us that what we cannot see is just as real and present as what we can. The rainbow, a sign of God's covenant never to abandon us again, could also be a sign that God is ever present with us. So whose with me? Season of Epiphany? Rainbows! Show of hands!

Okay. I can see I have not quite convinced you all just yet. And I am not sure where we would get rainbow paraments anyway. But whether we raise up epiphany into a major liturgical season or not, we should still celebrate and continue to seek out recognition of epiphanic moments.

Over the past three weeks we have seen all that they have to offer us. Epiphanic moments provide us with an invitation to live in a new way. Epiphanic moments allow us to recognize the proximity we have to the immense power of God. Epiphanic moments offer us wholeness and healing. With all of that being offered to us every day, how can we not celebrate epiphanic moments and seek to experience more of them?

There is no magical formula to recognize God's presence in our midst. We do not have the single star of the magi. But I

am struck by something that occurs in each of the three scripture texts we have read these past weeks. In the first text we heard, Jesus calls the disciples to follow him while they are in the midst of their work as fishermen. And they listened. Listening for God in the midst of our everyday normal lives is a great step in recognizing God's presence in our midst. In the second text, when Jesus frees the man from the demons, this all occurs in the synagogue. It may sound trite but worshiping together is a great step in recognizing God in our midst. And in the text we heard this morning we can take a cue, from the healer, Jesus, who escapes from the crowds to have some quiet time alone for prayer. Routinely stepping away from the hustle and bustle for a time of prayer or meditation is a great step in recognizing God's presence in our midst.

So, I will make you a deal, I will not go out shopping for rainbow paraments if we all seek to celebrate our epiphanic moments and recognize more of them in whatever way works best for each of us.

We are different people depending upon the company we keep. Imagine who we will be when we recognize we are ever in the presence of the divine.

Thanks be to God. Amen.