

## Sermon 26 January 2020- Epiphany 3 - 1 Corinthians 1:10-18, Matthew 4:12-23

(09:30 using Psalm 27:1-11; day after conversion of St Paul)

Lord God, help us see you at work in our lives around us. Amen

- **An epiphany** -- a light-bulb moment – when scales fall from your eyes-the penny finally drops and you understand something that perhaps has been there all along but you only just realise it's meaning or significance- this is how the word is used today isn't it?
- And , like so many words or phrases we use in English, this surely stems from the biblical use of epiphany – the season of Epiphany we are in now – the time when we celebrate and think about Jesus, the Son of God , being made known to people of every race and nation, not just the Jews , as their Saviour.
- Beginning with the 3 Kings (who were not Jews)– wise men from the East recognising Jesus as the Messiah, emphasising that the God of love is there for everyone – being made known to people in the person of Jesus, fully human and fully divine
- Yesterday the church celebrated the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul and his road to Damascus epiphany where he encountered Jesus in a blinding flash of great light. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity led up to this Feast Day – which ties in nicely with the 1 Corinthians reading we heard today where even in the earliest days of the church people were bickering and jostling and following their own particular leaders rather than concentrating on what united them.
- Paul is rightly appalled that this is already happening in the developing church “*you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose.....Has Christ been divided?*” and pulls them back to the central tenet all Christians have of believing Jesus to be the Son of God who died for us on the cross taking our sins once and for all upon himself so that we can be healed and forgiven and made right with God.
- We are saved by Jesus's sacrifice through the overwhelming power of God's love. As Christians this gives us the tremendous hope in love conquering death and making us a new creation when we follow Jesus. People who don't believe in Christ and his resurrection, see the crucifixion as a defeat of just another person attempting and failing to overthrow the occupying Roman power in Judea.
- *For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.(1 Cor 1 v 18)*
- Sometimes when we are overburdened we can't see the great light of Christ even though it is shining directly in our lives.
- Maybe we have become distanced from God by just coping with our hectic lives or at the other end of the spectrum by being caught up in joy of a holiday, success at school or work, weeks of freedom ....we don't see the great light of Christ then because we seem perfectly happy with life through our own efforts
- God never gives up giving. We may move away from the light for a while, but the light actually never goes out
- God's love is there all the time, as a great shining light – sometimes we see it, sometimes we chose not to see it and think we are fine on our own, sometimes we are blinded by it, sometimes we are so low we doubt whether it's really there or can really be meant for us,
- But it *is*.... God's love made visible to us through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, being there at the beginning of the world, being there as a human on earth around 2000 years ago and continuing to be there now in our lives through the Holy Spirit working within us
- Sometimes we have to face the light head on , face a sudden great challenge within ourselves about what we are doing and what is the best way for us as an individual to serve God, or to face into the light and hold fast to Christian hope when faced with a bereavement or another life changing moment of some kind.
- An epiphany is Jesus making something clear to us as an individual.
- Maybe an epiphany for you is Jesus drawing you closer to himself, bringing you here today?
- Maybe it is finding yourself in a conversation with someone that will have consequences for your faith journey?

- Or realising you're in a patch of your life where you need some help and that letting Jesus into your thinking may give you the calmness to think where that help could come from, and then having the courage to follow these promptings of the Holy Spirit?
- Or the uplifting feeling that you *are* valuable and loved by Jesus – maybe someone has just thanked you for something- don't just brush it aside....., acknowledge it....., you have made that moment better in the life of the other person – small positive things DO make a difference and “help the world go round” and can rightly add to your feeling of self-worth.
- Most of us will have multiple roles - a paid or voluntary job, part of a family, perhaps a role here at St Mary's church, a home to run or responsibilities in other organisations , part of a sports team, music group or hobby group- these all contribute to the unique person we are , at this precise time in our lives - the dynamics change over the years and it is a fine balancing act to keep all the plates spinning in the air - sometimes they fall and we may have to put some aside for a while or we have to swap a plate for one of a different pattern, after all , it's dangerous to get too proud of our achievements and life is a perpetual challenge!
- But with Jesus alongside we can have confidence that God loves us so much that he will help us keep the plates spinning, or help us have an epiphany moment of which ones we could let go (maybe even just for a while) - he may even challenge us to put all the plates down, give them a spring clean and take a deep breath (or several) before we pick them up again more able to cope calmly with their demands... or perhaps he is asking us to pick up different ones?
- Are epiphanies more likely to happen if we immerse ourselves in the Bible through personal reading, prayer, and asking questions of other Christians– wanting to discover more about Jesus, being amazed at the messages the bible is giving us through its pages – I think the answer is “yes” – because through worship and bible study and exploring discipleship we give ourselves more opportunity to become more attuned to looking at life through God’s perspective and can prepare us to see Jesus at work in our lives around us
- However, epiphanies by their very definition “light bulb moments” take us by surprise ,
- Some epiphanies are moments of pure joy but some can be scary - we suddenly realise we have to look for a new job, move house, make huge dietary or lifestyle changes, adjust to health issues within our family rather than carry on with the status quo which actually may not be ideal, in particular with regard to our life as a Christian.
- An epiphany is the catalyst of change but once we've got over the shock of accepting it, it's just the start – we have to work at the transformation Jesus is calling and encouraging us to make- it won't necessarily be easy - life will still get in the way but Jesus isn't going away –and God doesn't give up giving us his love
- Epiphanies can lead to big decisions and changes but we can't and don't have to embark on these journeys alone.
- The light never goes out..... Jesus is always with us..... God never gives up giving us his love.
- So this season of Epiphany, what great light will Jesus shine in your life that you will notice or has shone already?
- Or what epiphany moment can you enable someone else to experience as you let the love of God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit work in you and with you and through you?
- And why not take the first verse of today's Psalm as your comfort and strength this Epiphany and for ever: "**The LORD is my light and my salvation**" (Ps 27v1a)
- Katrina Nice 26.1.20