

Sermon: Epiphany 2

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January 15, 2017

Year A

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-12

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

Behold the Lamb of God... who takes away the sin of the world... but there is sin in the world... isn't there... there's still sin... Jesus has taken away the sin of the world... but there's still violence... and treachery... and greed... and on and on... in taking away the sin of the world... Jesus has forgiven us... but I'm not sure we really know what forgiveness is... I'm not sure we know how deep forgiveness goes... because too often... it seems to me... the world doesn't want to forgive others... but wants to be forgiven... the world wants others to reap what they sow... but wants to reap something other than what it sows... the world wants to hold others accountable for what they do... but doesn't want to be held accountable for what it does... we want there to be peace... but we want peace without justice...

Wayne Miller... of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the ELCA wrote: *You can't follow Jesus for ten steps... without bumping into questions of justice... but you can chase justice for 1,000 miles and still not find Jesus...* the Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the world... but after 2,000 years... there is still injustice in the world... so what does it mean to take away the sin of the world... and are we really following where Jesus is leading... are we seeing the path that he's on... seeing what's right in front of us...

It is possible... to see something that's not there... people do it all the time... I recently read that the among the greatest sins... is our ability to rationalize just about anything to ourselves... see it the way that serves us best... convince ourselves why we deserve to be above the law... why our ends justify our means... and there are many phenomena... in which we can see something that's not there... in some cases... it's an optical illusion... in other cases... it's the assumptions or agendas we bring to our experiences...

On December 4... I brought in one example... an auto-stereogram... and it shows how easy it is to see a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional sheet of paper... a BBC science program... showed how by staring for a few seconds at a false-color image... in this case a Scottish castle... you can desensitize the rods and cones in your eye to certain colors... and then when the false-color image is replaced by a black and white version of the exact same image... you see the black and white image in full natural color... you see full color where there is none... and I have been fooled by my own mind... into not perceiving visually what was right in front of me... I once looked at a woman who was not my sister-in-law... but because of how I was feeling... I saw my sister-in-law... I once thought I couldn't possibly have a Costco membership... because the people who do *that* have massive pantries to store the large quantities they sell... but that turned out not to be so... and because of my own fears... I have been fooled into not understanding a situation with which I was confronted... and thought it meant something entirely different than what it did... we sometimes look but don't really see... because we sometimes see what we expect to see... and Jesus was not expected...

On January 1... I recounted that in Exodus 3... Moses asks God what God's "name" is... but Moses is not asking "what should I call you..." Moses is asking... *who are you... what are you like... what have you done...*

They said to him... *Rabbi... where are you staying?...* and Jesus answered... *Come and see...* on the surface... it seems like they're asking Jesus... at which hotel are you staying... how are the accommodations... but what they're asking is really spiritual code for... *in what state of being do you reside... what is the structure of your selfhood... what are you really all about...* these are the right things to be looking for... and Jesus says... come and see... don't take my word for it... come and experience it... perceive it... for yourselves...

God is always calling us deeper... calling us to repentance... calling us to continue to turn... from the world... to God... to turn from that which serves us... to that which

serves others... as the Epiphany Light... as the Illuminated Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world... Jesus takes away anything and everything which stands in the way of full relationship with God... the same relationship he and the Father shared... and if... if since... Jesus took away every impediment that stands between us and the Father... then the only impediments which remain... are ours... Jesus has forgiven us... has replaced the Law of Sowing with the Grace of Reaping... has not held us accountable for all we've done... and gives us peace... how have we... in this country and world... given these things to each other...

Robert Saler... the director of a seminary preaching program... wrote... *a church that promises purpose that is not cross-shaped... is a church that forms people to evade the call to discipleship... not listen for it... the life of discipleship is a life of purpose... but it must be discipleship first...* and in her book... Mother Teresa wrote that sacrificial giving is part of redemption... she urged the sisters not to carry guilt... not to do penance... but to participate in God's work by sharing the suffering of others...

A disciple is one who follows... one who learns... one who is formed... I don't think the people of Two Churches would put up with me compromising the Gospel... but we seem to do that with our elected leaders... we seem to let them see something that's not there... or to not see something that is there... we seem to rationalize just about anything in self-serving ways... but the same Truth that's contained in the Gospel... is also contained in the Jewish Scriptures and in the Quran... it's the same Truth Martin Luther King, Jr. talked about in his I Have a Dream speech...

One can't compromise the Truth by saying it's not their truth... so we need to ask... how will our new government embody the Gospel... for that matter... how does any government embody the Gospel... and as we pray this week... in this same week... for the Gospel values for which Martin Luther King, Jr. contended... and as we pray for our new President and his advisors... let's remember that come and see... is an invitation to remember who we are... what we are like... and what we will do... and an invitation to

Truth... to the Gospel's entire Truth... and to our baptismal vows... to strive for justice and peace among all people... and respect the dignity of every human being... we are all invited... to Come and See...

Mike+