

Title: "Discovering Jesus in Epiphanies"

Text: Mark 9:2-13

We are continuing in our series of sermons on "Re-introducing Jesus."

-And today is Epiphany Sunday.

-January 6th, the last day of Christmas.

It is the day we remember the 3 Magi or Wise Men who came to the Christ-child bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and Myrrh.

They had received an Epiphany. A manifestation of God.

-It was the light of the star they had seen in the East.

-For them it was a manifestation of the news that a King had been born to be King of the Jews.

-They responded to that Epiphany by setting out to find the new born king and to worship and honor him.

Today I want to read you the story of another Epiphany.

-A manifestation of the light of God that took place on the day

when Peter, James, and John saw Jesus take on a radiant appearance,

-and they heard the voice of God once again proclaim Jesus to be His beloved Son.

So the wise men saw the radiant light of a star.

Peter, James and John were given to see the radiant light of Christ in a glorified form on that mount of Transfiguration.

My friends, those were Epiphanies. Revelations. Glimpses of the glory of God in its radiant splendor.

-And they are the kind of inspirational moments that we'd all like more of in our lives, right?

On the third Sunday in Advent when I was preaching on Joy,

-I talked about how such moments are gifts of God,

-and often come at unexpected times and as a surprise.

-But they come bringing a deep sense of joy.

But on this Epiphany Sunday, I'd like us to look a little deeper into the experience of some of those in the Bible, to whom God gave the gift of an Epiphany.

In this case, the three wise men: Balthazar, Melchior, and Gaspar,
-and the three disciples, Peter, James, and John.

And what I'd like us to notice is that in each case,
-no matter how much joy there might have been in the experience of beholding the radiance of God,
-the result of the experience was a calling to some form of obedience that involved hardship.

The wise men saw the star, and they somehow felt compelled to go off on a dangerous trip half-way across the Oriental world to find a baby.

-I don't know how that worked for Balthazar, Melchior, and Gaspar,
-but the light of that star somehow called each of them to do something about it.
-They felt called to get up and go.
-They felt called to leave their lives in Persia or India or wherever they were in the East,
-and head west on a long and arduous trip.

-And they seemed to know they were headed for Judea,
-but that was as much as they knew.
-And since it was a new born king that they sought to honor,
-they thought it only natural to head to the capital City of Jerusalem and to the palace of the reigning king.
-Where else would a new-born king be born, right?

Well, you know that story.

-That decision to tell King Herod about a newborn King of the Jews almost wrecked everything.
-It almost got the baby Jesus killed, and it did get all the other boy babies in the vicinity of Bethlehem killed.

There was no lasting joy in Bethlehem from the wise men's Epiphany experience.

-Their Epiphany did not make all things immediately well with the world.
-Their Epiphany did not make their own lives easier, or more peaceful, or more constantly joyful.

-What the Epiphany did, was compel them to get up and go, and in obedience they did.

And it mattered that they did.

-God used their obedience, even faulty though it was at times,
And their story is now part of the eternal story of the incarnation of Christ.

Now how about the disciples seeing Jesus transfigured and radiant on the mountain top?

-It was an amazing moment for them.

-They were given eyes to see their Master Jesus in a glorified state, radiant with light,
-and this was the image of Messiah that they had all been expecting and hoping for.

This was the “real deal,” and it was probably for them a sure sign that Jesus was now going to finally go out and conquer the world, and get rid of the Romans, and set up His Kingdom in Jerusalem.

And not only that, Jesus is accompanied in the vision by Moses and Elijah!

-I mean, this is an Epiphany to beat all epiphanies.

In fact, it is almost too much for them.

-Mark says in v. 6 that they were so frightened they didn't know what to say or do.

-And Peter blurts out his idea that maybe they should build little shelters to camp out in right there on the mountain top.

But it's what happens next that I want us to pay attention to.

It is then that the glory-cloud of God appears and surrounds them all, and God the Father's voice speaks from the cloud, -saying, “This is my Son, whom I love, listen to Him.”

And that is the end of the Epiphany. Whoosh. Just like that

-the vision ends, the cloud and Moses and Elijah disappear.

-Jesus looks normal again,

-and the disciples are looking around wondering where it all went.

But the vision ended with that simple call to obedience.

“This is my Son whom I love, listen to Him!”

No matter how cool the Epiphany was.

No matter how amazing it was to see Jesus radiant in glory
with Moses and Elijah.

No matter how much joy there was in beholding the glory of
God on earth.

-The disciples are left with a call to obedience.

“This is my Son....listen to Him.”

And what does Jesus say that they are to listen to?

-He gave them strict orders not to tell anyone what they had
just seen....until he had risen from the dead.”

So the “take away” message Jesus gives them from the whole
event is that the Son of Man is going to be killed,

-and they aren’t to say anything about what they have seen
and heard until he has risen from the dead.

And you know, that is not what Peter, James, and John want
to hear as a result of what they have just experienced.

-They want to hear about how Jesus will go to Jerusalem
-and glow like that, and wow the crowds,
-and be acclaimed as Messiah by everyone.

But Jesus tells his disciples that his journey from then on out,
just like the wise men, is going to be a difficult and
dangerous one.

-And in his case, it will end with his death in Jerusalem.

-That is His call to obedience in response to the Epiphany.

-Their call to obedience is to put their own ideas aside,
And listen to him.

And Mark says they didn’t even know what ‘rising from the
dead’ meant.

-So listening to Jesus was not just a simple act.

-It didn’t leave the disciples excited about the mission,
-and assured of Jesus identity,
-and ready to take on the world.

-The Epiphany experience left them somewhat bewildered
and confused.

They come down the mountain scratching their heads and trying to figure out what they have just seen and heard.

How could the experience they had just had not be something they should go and tell the whole world about?

How could the Messiah's coming to earth not end in power and glory?

How could it end as a death on a cross?

It made no sense to them at all.

-But Jesus said that was the plan of the Father.

-Jesus said that was the fulfillment of the Scriptures.

-Jesus said that was what He was fully committed to accomplishing.

The disciples job as a result of the epiphany was to simply listen to him.

So here's the thing about Epiphanies:

-our expectations and assumptions about what an Epiphany is supposed to do for us

-may not match up at all with the reality of the way God works in and through Epiphanies.

It's not that mountaintop experiences of joy and revelation are bad things.

-No, they are amazing experiences and I wish we would all experience more of them than we do.

All I want us to see today is that God doesn't give the gift of such experiences just to set our hearts aglow.

-He isn't trying to make us feel all warm and cozy.

-He gives such experiences to invite us into deeper discipleship.

-He makes Himself known to us so that we might hear His invitation to follow.

He is always calling us to listen to His voice, and then do what He is compelling us to do.

-Our obedience to the calling is the "intended fruit" of an Epiphany.

-It's beautifully summed up here in the words of the Father from the cloud: "This is my Son, whom I love, listen to him."

This past Thursday I woke up feeling the post-holiday doldrums.

-I was tired and grumpy.

-Nancy said, "Are you alright? Are you mad at me about something?"

I said, "No, I'm just tired and grouchy."

I was a little worn out after the holidays,

-and I was feeling sad about getting ready for Barbara

Coyman's Memorial Service: I was missing her already.

-And I don't know, I just had a whole lot on my mind and I was feeling tired and grouchy.

And I went downstairs to do my exercise routine and then to have my morning quiet time.

-And the Psalm that morning that my daily Bible reading cycle had up for me was Psalm 85.

-There's a line in Psalm 85:8 that says, "*I will listen to what the LORD God is saying, for He is speaking peace to his faithful people, and to those who turn their hearts to him. Truly his salvation is very near to those who fear him.*"

Now mind you, I also had this sermon that I had been working on all week rolling around in my head.

-So the words, "This is my Son, whom I love, listen to Him" Were right there at the forefront of my mind."

And now the psalmist says, "I will listen to what the Lord God is saying, for He is speaking peace to his faithful people."

My friends, that was a little epiphany for me that morning.

-I felt like God was saying, "I know right where you are, Paul, And you're allowed to feel tired and grumpy once in a while, but listen to me this morning as you get ready for your day.

-I am speaking peace to you, and my salvation is very near, -it's right here at hand. Just reach out and receive it."

And it wasn't so much that I was overcome with a feeling of peace,

- it was more that I sensed God asking me to respond in obedience and actually listen to Him.
- He wanted me to actually listen to the word of peace He was speaking to me, and receive it. Believe it. Trust in it.

I wasn't being condemned for being grumpy and tired.

- I was just being invited to listen to God, and allow him to speak His word of peace over me.

It changed the nature of my day.

- God's word to me set me on a new trajectory for the day.
- There was still much I needed to do that day,
 - and I was still kind of tired, but I wasn't so grumpy about it.
- I stepped out in obedience, trusting that He was with me, and that He was speaking peace to me, and that his salvation was very near.

That was the obedience I was being invited to on Thursday.

- It wasn't all that difficult.
 - Not like the wise men journeying all the way to Judea.
 - Not like Jesus going to the cross,
 - Or the disciples laying down their own preconceived notions in order to follow Jesus in the way of the cross.

But it was a call to obedience that I initially didn't feel like doing, but which ended up being a way to life for me that day.

So I urge us all again today,

- pay attention to the ways God shows up in your life.
- Look for those epiphanies where He makes Himself known to you.
- But don't expect he will show up just to make you feel better.

He usually shows up because He wants to invite us to another step of discipleship.

- And He wants us to listen to him.
- That's what Epiphanies are all about.

Let us pray.