

I come to you in the name of one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power.”

I have become this servant, servant to the message that has been left for me, servant to the power that is inherently found within faith in God who constantly and consistently offers to me, to all of us, the gift of grace, servant to the path that Christ has left for all of us, a path of ministry, a path of teaching, a path of self-sacrifice and turning the status quo of the world on its ear. Even though I am the very least of all of the saints, that great cloud of witnesses who have come, gone, and are still to come, even though I am the first among sinners, I'm still a faithful servant, because God's grace allows me to be, because of the boundless riches of Christ, news of which I cannot hold onto myself, this is news that must be shared to the world, with you, with all.

For it is through the church that the wisdom of God in all of its rich varieties, the gift of grace we don't deserve but receive anyways, the ability to connect to, to interact with, to be in the presence of God incarnate in God's only son Jesus Christ, it is through this shared experience we have as the faithful gathering of believers we call church, that the wisdom of God can, must, be shared, be made known to the rulers and authorities not only of the heavenly places, but right here, right now, in this place, in this time. Because of Jesus Christ, we have access to God. Because of Jesus Christ, we can exercise boldness and confidence in claiming this access to God, in claiming the access to the limitless power of God, as expressed in God's grace, in God's righteousness. This is not vindictive, vengeful, smiting righteousness. This is not righteousness based on the size of your military might. This is the

righteousness as taught us by Jesus Christ, a righteousness based on love, love for God, love for neighbor, all neighbors, radical love that is only seen when we (finally) recognize the presence of Christ in one another, when we (finally) have that epiphany, that revelation, that all of the power and authority that we build up in this life is nothing if it is not built upon the foundation of the reality of God's grace, God's presence in this world.

Paul clearly knew this in writing to the Ephesians. And Paul's example, both here in Ephesians and in all of his writing, is one of faith, of accepting a call, of having a belief in the power of God, faith, acceptance, and belief that are based on his own experience of epiphany, of being exposed to God made manifest in Jesus Christ. It'd be hard not to have that moment of epiphany, honestly. If Jesus were to appear before you, in all of his glory and power, you would be hard pressed not to accept the new reality being laid out before you.

And this is why we make special note of this day. This is why we cheat a little here at St. John's and celebrate it on a Sunday each year, even though technically it happens on a fixed day, the sixth of January, the ending of the twelve days of Christmas. We do this little bit of cheating, to remind ourselves of the manifestation, the revelation of God incarnate as Jesus Christ. We do this, so that we may reflect on our own experience of epiphany.

The wise men are a bit of a mystery to us. We traditionally think of three wise men because they offer three gifts, but all we really know is that there are plural wise people journeying to meet the new king. These wise men come from the East, they are outsiders, gentiles, and yet they come to pay homage to the king of the Jews, for they have seen the rising of his star. The witnessing of this event by these wise men, and within this narrative

the failure of the Jewish authorities and leaders to recognize the birth of their own prophesied Messiah, marks for us the physical manifestation of Jesus Christ to the gentiles. It connects us to Christ from the very beginning. It connects us to the birth of our savior. It connects us as outsiders who are nonetheless welcomed in when we acknowledge the reality of Christ, and in being so welcomed we give of ourselves gifts to this savior, both in recognition of his incarnate nature and for the gifts that we receive in experiencing and accepting this epiphany.

But, as the “servants of the gospel” this moment of epiphany in our collective story is merely a launching point for our own experience of faith. We must ask ourselves, where have we, where do we, witness Epiphany in this world. Where and when have we seen, have we enabled others to see, God incarnate in Jesus Christ.

We can turn to Paul for ideas of where we may see this reality play out in the world all around us. When we see the gift of God’s grace at work in this world, we are charged with making that gift known to others. When we are humbled before God as the least of all of the saints, we still are part of that heavenly host, and we must make it clear to others that no matter how they view themselves (whether that be lowly or inflated), the power of God’s grace, the boundless riches that are found in following Christ, are available to us if we simply accept them. And, in looking at how this reality is made present for others, we also must ask what is our own personal experience of Epiphany. When did we see, know, accept, the reality of God incarnate in Jesus Christ, and how do we share that story, that reality of our faith, with others.

I have come to realize, at least in this part of the country, I'm in a bit of a minority group in that I've never had a true crisis of faith, I've never questioned the whole thing, been all that angry at God, felt distant from God. Partly this is due to knowing nothing else, growing up in the church and having opportunities for formation like Camp Cross that truly make a world of a difference, and partly this is the reality of my own faith that I knew God was always there for me (even if I didn't at the time quite know what that meant). But, that doesn't mean that I've always lived into my faith. And, it was in a time when I distanced myself from the practice of faith, that I had my own epiphany.

It's funny really how self-absorbed we can become when we put God on the back burner and try to take on the world ourselves. This self-absorption feeds into our hunger to be successful, to be self-made, to be independent, even if that means stripping away the support of others, of stripping away the gift of God's grace as we push on alone, isolated, and further isolating ourselves, even as challenges emerge, even as the weight of the world becomes harder and harder to bear. My epiphany, my revelation, came when I realized that I didn't need to do it all alone. My epiphany, came when I turned towards God to ask for help, and found God waiting with open arms, with grace, to guide me, to call me, to allow me to accept that the reality of faith, at least for me in that moment, is that the act of God being made incarnate in Jesus Christ means we don't have to go it alone, means we don't have to face this world isolated, stripped of every support. This revelation fundamentally changed the course of my life. This revelation is why I stand before you today as a priest. That is the power of epiphany. That is why we make special effort to mark this day, even on the Sunday following the prescribed date for this holy event.

Now, we're not all called to become clergy in the Episcopal Church, but we are called to do something with our experience of epiphany. We have to be able to share the fact that God was made incarnate in Jesus Christ, a revelation that comes with accepting the teachings of Christ, a revelation that comes with accepting that we are called to be "servants of the gospel" and with that comes a responsibility to strive for the reality of God's righteousness in this world.

This is a righteousness that runs so countercultural to the way of the world that for some reason we seem to have at the least resigned ourselves to the fact that this world will continue in its destructive and broken path, and at the worst desperately hope for it to continue. We know that we are broken people, but we struggle with getting out of our own way. We resign ourselves to our brokenness as individuals, as a society. Perhaps this is because we have invested so much in it and turning against it feels like failure. The reality is that turning against the ways of this world is our only hope at healing that brokenness, at changing the ways of this world from that path of destruction to that of the wisdom of God. It will take individual epiphany moments to know that even in our brokenness, God's grace is still there for us, waiting for us. It will take individual epiphany moments to accept our call to stand against the destruction, the false righteousness of this world.

And, it will take a collective epiphany moment to fundamentally alter the reality of this world. Thankfully this moment has already happened in the incarnation of God, revealed to the gentiles when the wise men came to pay homage to the Christ child. Unfortunately, many seem to have forgotten this epiphany. It is our responsibility as the "servants of the gospel" to remind them.

Amen.