



Epiphany is all about manifesting the glory of God and inviting people in to see it, know it, and encounter it.

“Come and see,” was the invitation from Philip to Nathaniel last week. As Nathaniel was coming towards Jesus with great suspicion, wondering whether “anything good could come out of Nazareth,” Jesus saw him and declared to “know” him. At this Nathaniel asks, “where did you get to “know” (or “see”) me?” It is a profound encounter that is illustrative of the movement expressed in so many of these texts.

In encountering the glory of God people are inevitably changed. Abraham is changed. Moses is changed. Mary is changed. Nathaniel is changed.

The movement that happens is that people become “known” for the first time. They become known for all that they are. They become “seen.” They become “heard.” It’s a vulnerable position, but also a strangely comforting thing to become fully known, seen and heard; and what is consistently unique about this experience is that Jesus *stays* with them. He doesn’t condemn them, desert them, or berate them.

In the story about Jonah, the change is not only with the people, but it is recorded that the change also

happens for God. “I will not bring calamity upon the people of Nineveh.”

Change is the whole movement in the narrative of the scriptures. You are aware of this because you hear it expressed in the services of Lessons and Carols we had back in Advent and Christmas. Those services begin with the great woe of the banishment from the garden of Eden, the punishment for eating the forbidden fruit, the consequences of wanting to “become like God, knowing good and evil.” It blew their circuits. They couldn’t handle it, and it led them to hide, to blame, to cover up, and to die. It was like they no longer wanted to be “known.”

All of the remaining lessons in those services are about God longing to change that outcome. We hear of a movement to usher in something completely unexpected and impossible: to bring a blossom in the desert, to bring the lamb with the lion, to bring a comfort to my people; to bring a light in the darkness; life where there was death; hope where there was fear; forgiveness where there was condemnation.

So the story of Jonah and Nineveh is a microcosm of the bigger story. It captures this movement from condemnation and calamity to a change of heart (on all sides) and results unexpectedly in life.

The gospels are a record of the fulfillment of this change of heart from God’s perspective. In the midst

of a fearful, oppressed, marginalized people on the edge of the Roman Empire God has become *very* near. So rejoice!

Jesus says in the gospel of Mark, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the good news.”

But Jesus says this after Mark records that John was arrested. What an extraordinary detail to include.

John is arrested and Jesus announces yes, this is the right time to say “God is near” and subsequently he calls Simon and Andrew, and James and John to leave their nets and follow him.

The event of being arrested is always a troubling and traumatic thing. It suggests that you’ve transgressed, trespassed, violated the law. The event of arrest of John, the herald of the coming light, triggers Jesus to say that the time is right. This is the moment when God had come near, so leave your nets and follow this path. The gospel is bracketed by two arrests: John is arrested at the beginning of the gospel and Jesus will be arrested at the end of the gospel. In these moments of trauma, for innocent people, who are blamed for transgression and violation, God will become most near.

The next time we hear about John’s arrest Jesus will receive a message from John in prison. John sends a

message to Jesus asking whether he is the one or are we to expect another.

Jesus sends a message back: “Tell John what you see and hear: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them.”

In other words, this is the moment of revelation and fulfillment. God is not only near, but God is initiating and ushering in something that could never be accomplished by ourselves.

You become known, seen and heard, and you are not condemned, shamed, alienated or punished. You are brought in. You are pulled out of the ditch on the side of the road and your wounds are bandaged up and the innkeeper is told to look after you. You are brought in and sandals are put on your feet, rings on your fingers and the fatted calf is killed for a great feast. You are brought in and lowered from the roof and told that you can now walk. You are brought in and tears are wiped from your face and you are declared delivered from your shame. The gospels are filled with endless numbers of people who encounter this light in their midst and are changed.

We too are brought in. As you respond to the call of God in your life, may your heart be changed and be given courage that as you become known, seen and heard, you might know the One who sets you free.