

Jeremiah 1:4-10

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Luke 4:21-30

Psalm 71:1-6

St. Thomas's Anglican Church

+In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I apologize if I end up having to stare down or squint at my homily text this morning. As many of you are aware, I went back to Hawaii over the Holidays for eye surgery. Though my vision is improving, it will still be about a month or so before I can be fitted with new contacts and glasses. Our eyes, these gelatinous orbs in our head, can only perceive a small fraction of the EM spectrum, and yet our world primarily requires sight to function so even a minor loss of vision can cut us off from the world. There is of course so much that we cannot see like radio, infrared, ultraviolet light, X-rays, and gamma-rays.

There is so more out there that we can never fully perceive and understand by our senses alone. Do we see everything around us, do we truly perceive what is around us? No, we cannot. We really do, as Saint Paul says, "see through a glass, darkly," and on this side of eternity we do not always perceive God's working in the world, we only conceive of it in part.

Our narrow vision, perhaps physically but certainly in all of faculties, predisposes us to maintaining a sense of continuity and normalcy. It is engrained in our biology, change and disturbance is dangerous, familiarity and normalcy is safe. We notice when something is amiss, we react to disruptions even if we try to ignore the unwelcomed sight, sound, touch, taste, or scent. One story of the COVID-19 pandemic is how the desire for a return to normalcy runs alongside the ongoing and everchanging health and safety restrictions. Of course, we can also welcome change, we can celebrate the change in our midst, but we can then react negatively

when change is out of control. We want change on our terms. This is again another story of the COVID-19 pandemic, how people respond when health and safety restrictions are imposed on society. Our ability to cope with change and accept it can be linked to how well we are able to see or perceive our world beyond ourselves. If we are in a darkened room looking in a mirror, we see very little of ourselves and the room around us. But bring a light or candle and it illuminates the room and we see more.

Epiphanytide is the story of Christ's continual and ongoing manifestation in our world. His appearing in our world brings the Light of God to our lives which allows us to see the creation in its totality and to bring completion to that which incomplete. The Epiphany continues into our own age and brings us face to face with the source of all faith, hope, and love.

Jesus's return to Nazareth in Luke's Gospel differs from the other Gospels. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark say that Jesus performs no great acts there, but Luke gives us more. Fresh out of the desert and after his debut on the scenes in Galilee, the now up and coming preacher comes back to his small country hometown. It almost has the makings of a Hallmark Movie. This is Jesus, the carpenter Joseph's son, and his teaching in the local synagogue caused his fellow Nazarenes to be "amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth." Apparently something good can come out of Nazareth.

Very quickly though Jesus goes from the returning hometown hero to pariah and this happens because of the perceived sense of familiarity in Nazareth and how Jesus disrupts it. The other Nazarenes don't contest that their hometown hero is a prophet, but because they think they know him they should therefore have a front row seat to his wonders and glory, because to them he is Joseph's son. He is one of their own. Jesus' proclamation of the Year of the Lord's Favour in the synagogue is indeed a sign of God's presence and manifestation in the world, it was a

prophetic proclamation, but what Jesus says to his neighbours here is also a prophetic proclamation he illuminated what was in their hearts.

Prophecy is more than just an oracle of the future, it is a reading of the present and a proclamation of God's work and judgement in the world. Prophets in the Biblical narrative in the Hebrew Bible were often hated and feared because they spoke to the present and they revealed those things that people did not see or did not want to see. Even more so that a prophet is rejected at home because they shine a light most brightly on the cracks in the fabric and foundations of that community that no one wants.

Jesus' remarks reveal what lies in the hearts of the people around him. In essence its them saying "come here Jesus, let us perform some miracles." They want Jesus to perform works of power on their terms, for their own benefit. What he did elsewhere, do for them. Their desires are perfectly reasonable, we often ask for God to intervene in our lives and in our world. We ask this in our liturgy, "God hear our prayer for the church and the world, for the sick and those in need, and for the dead." Is this any different than what the people of Nazareth desires? Yes, we have faith, but wouldn't it be so much easier for us if God revealed himself fully amongst us in a way we can perceive through our immediate senses, through our eyes?

In a world still in the grips of a pandemic, with war drums being sounded by Russia and NATO, and with political instability here at home, having Jesus appear before us to do what he has done in ages past in our own era would be a balm in these times. Of course God does move, act, and respond to human suffering. The power of prayer, the Sacramental life of the church brings life and healing. Mountains can be moved by that faith the size of a mustard seed, and thanks be to God for those moments. But it doesn't always happen it seems like. Jesus retorts that God indeed moved through the prophets Elijah and Elisha in their time, bringing life and

healing, but did so only for two people. What's left unspoken is that while God moved to act for these two, many others suffered. A cold comfort indeed. But we have all been there, praying desperately in a time of sorrow, and finding only silence as the response.

What can that silence feel like? It is like standing atop of the summit of a great mountain, the winds tearing about you, and finding yourself buried alive - trapped, helpless and alone. It is knowing what you want to say and never finding the words. It is a chorus, replaced with silence. It is like having the energy of youth, and feeling the cloak of the years fall upon you, and feeling that you are weak, fragile and a thing easily discarded. Is it futile to even ask, to have hope, to want God to act? Is it selfish to reach out in that hope that God will appear? Is it our fault that God did not act?

It is when we are faced with silence though that we can also find the greatest wellspring of hope because even in the midst of our sorrows our prayers are still heard and held though we might see it. Jesus shines a light in those dark places to reveal that he shares in our suffering as well. We are never alone in that silence. He weeps alongside us, prays alongside us, and is present in those long silent hours of the night when the whole world seems to overwhelm us. His love is still there, still present; that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Though we may not see with our eyes the fullness of God's design, the deep yearning and feelings we feel in any given moment is no less significant or important. What we feel is still real, still affirmed, it still matters, and is still held close by our Saviour. We can find meaning and understanding illumined by Christ in the darkness of our world and be transformed by it.

Though all things may come to an end; faith, hope, and love will endure because they are the vital forces and energies that transform us. "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." Just as

Christ's epiphany continues to illuminate our world, we to are transformed by it so that we may illuminate the worlds of others so that we can all see the true glory of God. It is the passions of all living things turned into energy, into a chorus of song that brings into being new life, new wonders, and new mysteries.

What makes Jesus's fellow Nazarenes distinct here is that their desire for him to do what he did for others in their midst is that they wish it to be done on their terms. To have it be a magic trick rather than the place where they too can participate in Christ's manifestation in the world. It is the desire for transformation without change, the desire for the familiar without conceiving the brokenness of the present, to mistake ourselves as the conductor and composer of the symphony where we are only a note in that sonata that is one piece of a greater whole. Christ reveals that to them as he reveals all parts of our human condition, and they respond in a very human way, in anger, in resentment, and they turn on him and try to drive him off a cliff. Ironically, he does perform a mighty feat in spite of them, he passes through their midst, passing through their resistance to change and continues to manifest and transform the world.

When Christ reveals our own humanity, we can respond in a myriad of ways. Sometimes we see our humanity for what it is, broken but so deeply loved, and are transformed in cooperation and embracing the love that Jesus has for us. Sometimes we recoil at what we see, and we lash out at the messenger. Sometimes it is a mix of both or something all together different.

Nevertheless, Christ continues to manifest his light and presence through the complexity, chances, and changes of our lives even when it seems that that very light is absent, missing or gone, even if we are trying to reach for it and it seems far away, we find that Christ is still manifesting himself in the darkness and revealing himself in ways to direct us to that light.

Change will occur, because Christ's entry into this world changes the fundamental nature of the world revealing the love that brought creation into being and sustains that creation. Our calling is to see beyond what we can see, and find in there our true home of faith, hope, and love, and that home will endure because Christ is its foundation and cornerstone.

What we build with Christ endures because what is loved endures, because love itself will endure and we shall see it in all of its glory when all things are completed.

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