

Epiphany 2A (1/19/2020)

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-11

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

If the time after Epiphany is a season to witness Christ, it's also a season to witness to Christ. The gift of faith is to perceive him; the work of faith is to point to him, not only to the way he makes God known to his first followers, but also to us.

The time after Epiphany is a season to witness the Word made flesh in our sacred story, to rediscover the identity of Christ as it is revealed at various points in the Gospel. At the outset of the season, we arrive at the place of his birth alongside the magi as fellow representatives of the nations, peoples of the world who are strangely drawn to a Jewish king born in humble circumstances. We stand waist-deep in the Jordan with John the Baptizer as the Spirit of God descends on the adult Jesus and a voice from heaven calls him Beloved. On the last Sunday after Epiphany, we'll scale the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John where Jesus, standing in the presence of other illustrious figures of the faith, will radiate the glory of God before our eyes. And along the way, we'll keep our eyes out for smaller epiphanies, moments of recognition and awareness that shed light on the one we call Teacher, Lord, Emmanuel.

Epiphanies like the one in our Gospel from John today. In the days following the baptism, John the Baptizer keeps his eyes out for Jesus, and doesn't hesitate to point him out to his own disciples as soon as he spots him on the street: "[Look,] here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ...I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.... I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." *Here, John insists, here is God's Word in the flesh.*

John sees Jesus for who he is. What's more, he says so. *Come and see*, the pattern goes, *then go and tell*.¹ If the time after Epiphany is a season to witness Christ, in other words, it's also a season to witness to Christ. Where is he revealed in our midst, what shall we call him, and how does he make God known to us? In a world that is still hungry for grace and truth, we have to be prepared to follow John's example and testify to Jesus, to articulate who, exactly, he is and what difference, specifically, he makes.

I can think of no more faithful witness to Christ than the saint whose birth we commemorate again tomorrow, The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. For all his courageous activism, for his commitment to a wildly inclusive vision of human community, it's easy to forget that he was rooted deeply in the Christian tradition. He was a disciple; therefore he was a champion for racial, economic, and geopolitical justice. To borrow the words of the prophet Isaiah from our first reading today, **King's cause was with the Lord, in spite of the challenges and setbacks, and by his faithfulness he illuminated the nation.** It's for this reason that his caution to the church of his day is worth hearing again, a caution not to miss the person of Christ among us on account of our fear or indifference:

[Excerpts from "Letter from Birmingham City Jail"²]

Dear church, **the gift of faith is to perceive Christ; the work of faith is to point to him.** Christ is revealed distinctively in each successive generation, in each unique context. And in this way, the baby born king of Israel radiates the eternal will of God throughout the ages, a will for justice, peace, and abundant life for all of God's beloved. God grant us eyes to see, and lips to tell.

¹ <https://members.sundaysandseasons.com/Home/TextsAndResources#resources>.

² *A Testament of Hope*, 299-301.