



5th Sunday after Epiphany

Sermon by Revd Sharmain James



4 February 2024

READINGS

Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

The light of Christ

We are at the end of the season of Epiphany - a season that focuses on sharing the light of Christ with the world. The season of the Epiphany – gave us the opportunity to think about the mission of Jesus to all nations. To Jews and Gentiles – slaves and free – men and women – rich or poor. ALL PEOPLE. We've seen that in the story of the Magi. The arrival of the Magi indicates that Jesus came to save all people, not just Jewish people. As we wrap up the season of Epiphany we continue to think of God's revelation to all people. And our appointed readings for today – takes us outside the church towards others. We see Christ revealed as the Son of God in his love for all people.

Today - we encounter this reading from 1 Corinthians 9 designated for the last Sunday of Epiphany. In it, we hear - how Paul sees himself becoming all things for all people. To the Jew he will be a Jew, to the Gentile, he will be a Gentile, so that he might win some for Christ.

To me it sounds like a people pleaser. It sounds like I have to change myself to fit in. If you are a Jew I will be a Jew in order to win you over. If you follow the 613 laws from the Old Testament, then I will observe the 613 laws to win you over. If you are weak – even if I am strong – I will be weak to win you over. Whatever you are – I will become that to win you over.

This is a contradiction to the society we live in that says you should be yourself. Don't become someone else. Don't sacrifice who you are. You do you. You be true to yourself. I believe that you need to be true to yourself. BUT - as a disciple of Christ – or a follower of Christ it is NOT about my or your truth or about expressing myself. That makes you turn in yourself. I am looking inside myself. I am expressing myself however I want to. I am being myself – and to that Paul says – "I have become all things to all people."

I.O.W - Being a true Christian means – setting aside all that is peculiar to me for the sake of my neighbour. Paul recognized that the Christian ministry was all about adaptation. He didn't change God's Word. He didn't change God's definition of right and wrong. He didn't change that core, unshakable truth of the forgiveness in Jesus. But he adapted his methods to communicate that rock-solid message to different people. He would share with anyone and everyone the blessings of the Gospel. His goal is not to express himself – but Paul's goal is to do everything he can to love, to serve and share the gospel with others.

In our Gospel reading after Jesus healed Peter's mother in-law and those who were brought to him and cast out demons – Mark tells us - Jesus gets up early, before anyone else in the house, and he goes off to a solitary place. You can almost feel his need to be alone. Jesus needed that personal time of prayer to strengthen himself for his spiritual ministry.

The disciples did not know where he was and went searching for him. While his disciples were looking for him, Jesus was probably praying to know his Father's will: How to confront the crowd's craving for the spectacular. Where to preach. How to identify the Kingdom so people could understand its meaning. How to clarify discipleship. How to describe the cross that lay ahead of him, and other deep concerns.

How much more do we need that quiet time apart to pray to get strength to serve Christ more effectively and face the temptations, struggles, and burdens we have to bear.

When the disciples found Jesus – they exclaimed: “everyone is looking for you”. They urge him back, but Jesus has his eyes cast somewhere along the road, over the hill, into the next valley. As much as they wanted more miracles, there would be no extra's in Capernaum. Jesus had already done his work, at least for now. It was time to move on.

Jesus says to them:

“Let us go to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.” And he does it. And he drags along this diverse crew of fishermen with him. There is a longing within the heart of Jesus that will not be content with the people he has gathered in the synagogue and in Peter's home that day. He is glad they are there; he is glad that their pain has been eased, but he casts his eye to the person outside and he would reach to them too.

Jesus cannot remain in that one synagogue, or in Peter's home, or in that one town. God had commissioned him to proclaim the message of redemption to all he could. Later in the Great Commission, Jesus would challenge his followers to take that message of God's grace into all the world, and he assured us that he would be with us until the end of time as we proclaim that gospel. Jesus will not let the disciples stay at home and minister to the people whom they know, with whom they are comfortable.

The mission of Christ is to the whole world, at least to the next village where sin has crippled, maimed, killed, and broken just as many lives as it has in Capernaum. Jesus calls us out of our comfort zones today - to see the world with his eyes and with his love for all people.

Christ did not call us in our baptism to serve ourselves, he did not establish this congregation to be a place where his people can meet and be friendly with their friends. He called us in baptism and brought together into a congregation so that his light might shine in dark places. So that his love might be expressed to people who do not know it. So that sinners might be forgiven and the lonely might find a friend.

If Christ's love is not revealed in our lives – and shared with all people - Christ remains hidden, unrevealed, Epiphany remains thwarted. Amen