

Our Epiphany

Sermon for the 2nd Sunday of Epiphany, Year A, 19 January
2020

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor, ACT

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Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1: 1-9; John 1: 29-42

+In the Name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Have you ever had a relationship, or an experience, or a job that was the making of you? Have you ever known a moment when you 'came to yourself', as they say? "If it hadn't been for that teacher who was patient with me, I don't know how I would have turned out". "Being a dad has really settled me down, and I feel sure now about what truly matters in life". 'I never really felt like a woman before that summer I spent with him'. 'That job was so hard, but it was the making of me'. Or even just a moment can do it. 'I don't know what happened, but after that encounter, after that incident, I was never the same again'.

Friends, this is what we see happening to Peter in today's Gospel, and something similar in our other readings this

morning. We're in the Epiphany season, when the focus is on Jesus revealed as God's light to the nations. When Jesus is revealed at last, everything changes for the world. And in today's Gospel, with all its comings and goings, Jesus is revealed more than once as the Lamb of God. But in Jesus' Epiphany comes our Epiphany as well. That's my point today. Simon is brought to Jesus who looks at him and sees something that Simon doesn't see.

Jesus sees his new identity, his role as the rock on whom Jesus' new movement will be established. Jesus knows who Simon is now, and who he's to become. Jesus gives him a nickname, Cephas, or Peter—the Rock, or perhaps 'Rocky'. I like to think of this as a friendly, inclusive gesture. You know you're 'in' when a group gives you a nickname, and nicknames often express something distinctive about yourself—my brother-in-law for years nicknamed me 'Optus', because when the family went out for Yum Cha and the trolley came around with more food, I was just like the old Optus advert: I always said 'Yes!'.

Friends, as Christians we believe that Jesus reveals who we most truly are. In baptism we receive our name, our Christian name, and with it our deepest identity for all time and eternity, as members of Jesus Christ. In all the sacraments we're

established in this new identity. In marriage and in ordination we become new people in a new context with new possibilities linked to new obligations. In confirmation we take the promises of baptism on ourselves and own our Christian name. In confession and anointing we come to Jesus soiled and wounded and powerless, and find ourselves sent out with a new strength, healed and forgiven. In the Eucharist we come in tired, distracted, unexpectant, perhaps, but we're gathered again as God's people, strengthened in word and sacrament, then sent out to love and serve the Lord.

The same message emerges in our other readings today. God's people in Isaiah are feeling defeated and powerless, but God reassures them of their special mission. They're to be God's light to the nations. It's not just about their survival; God has more in store for them than that: 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation shall reach to the end of the earth'. (Isa 49: 6).

In our Psalm today, an individual praises God for the gift of an identity, and a purpose in life. Many of us know the experience of being brought up from out of the pit of roaring waters, and

our feet being set on a firm foundation in life—and the task accompanying that gift is to live as God’s witness and servant. For priests this psalm is particularly appropriate, as we find our vocation in life as God’s heralds and pastors: ‘I have declared your righteousness in the great congregation; I have not restrained my lips, O Lord, and that you know’ (Ps 40: 11).

Our epistle today from 1 Corinthians is directed toward a Christian Church, perhaps no bigger in numbers than our gatherings here in O’Connor, and in it we find yet another epiphany. This small group of struggling Christians in Corinth, with all sorts of problems, are revealed to be God’s beloved children, called by God to live blameless lives in Christ because God has powerfully established them with speech and knowledge of every kind, not lacking in every spiritual gift. Whatever else you might think of yourselves, this epiphany is for you: that you are God’s people, that God wants you to take to heart God’s confidence in you as God’s Church.

So friends as Jesus is revealed to us in the season of Epiphany, so may our true natures be revealed in him—our meaning and purpose in life, as Christian individuals and as his Church.

The Lord be with you...