

January 26, 2025 – 3rd Sunday of Epiphany – Revd Wim Kuiper
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Readings: Psalm 19, Luke 4.14-21

Today is called the 3rd Sunday of Epiphany. Epiphany is the season on the church calendar that stretches between Christmas and Candlemas, next week, after which our liturgical colour changes back to the green of so called ordinary time. Epiphany; I quit like that strange word that has its roots in ancient Greek. *Epi* means 'upon' and *phaino* means 'I shine'. So, you could say that it is linked to a moment of special enlightenment. When you google the meaning of this word you find this more general definition: 'A moment of sudden and great revelation or realisation.' An example of using it in everyday language would be: "A few years ago, I had an epiphany." Anyone ever used such a phrase? Within the church context we are of course talking about the revelation of Christ and the realisation of his great and continuing impact on us, and upon our world. A realisation that may indeed be very sudden, surprising and certainly light giving or enlightening. In the stories of the Bible we hear of Christ's first manifestation at his birth, that literally came about with a lot of light. The light of the angels for the shepherds, and the light of the star for the three wise men. The shepherds representing in a way the people of Israel, and the three kings the peoples of the world. Together with the Holy family, Mary and Joseph, they were the first to have this epiphany of Christ experience, seeing the new born babe in that lowly stable in Bethlehem. And shortly after, in the temple in Jerusalem where Jesus was presented by his parents, comes that moment of epiphany for Simeon and Anna. They also suddenly realise how special this baby Jesus is, as we will hear in next week's Candlemas Gospel.

On the three Sundays of Epiphany between Christmas and Candlemas, we read about three different kinds of epiphanies. Three other types of manifestation of who Jesus is and what he stands for, related rather to his earthly ministry as a grown up man. It started with his baptism at the river Jordan. Here Jesus was revealed to be the beloved Son of the Father, on whom the Spirit rests; fully divine and fully human, integral part of a triune God. Last Sunday we read about his first wonderful sign at the wedding in Kana. Where Jesus showed how he is able and willing to turn the water of our individual and collective life into wine. Bringing his light, joy and celebration to a people that walked in darkness.

And this Sunday, we watch Jesus preaching in Nazareth. Telling his listeners how he himself inaugurates a different, a new kind of society of which also Isaiah and the other prophets had dreamed. A new kind of living together well, that he calls the kingdom of heaven to be established on earth. And of which we are called to be the agents. A turnaround that is good news to the poor, that brings about freedom for the captives and the oppressed, and restores the vision of the blind. The reading from Isaiah is followed by an extremely short sermon with only one powerful sentence: 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' But to be fair, this is not all that Jesus says at that time in the synagogue of Nazareth. Our reading ends there but, as most of you will know, the story goes on. And what else Jesus has to say, drastically changes the mood of the congregation. From 'speaking well of him and being amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips' (verse 22), it ends into throwing him out of the synagogue and town, trying even to throw him off a nearby cliff

(verse 29). Aggressive behaviour related to a tricky topic. Namely, the fact that Jesus clearly extends his mission towards the gentiles, or, as we would call them today, the migrants, the foreigners and strangers. Does this type of polarisation and aggression sounds familiar to you? It is hard not to see some parallels there.

The biblical prophets including the greatest of them all, our Lord Jesus Christ, proclaimed the values of a kingdom that is welcomed by many with its vision and promise of a better world. But this vision is also strongly opposed by many others. Felt as provocative, woke, subversive, even revolutionary and therefore to be rejected, if needed to be stamped out. Loving our neighbour as ourselves, viewing every human being as having an equal dignity, including those who are looked down upon within society, has never gone uncontested. And it still isn't, not even in our own contemporary Western societies. A clear illustration to me this week, was the controversy around the pre-inauguration service in Washington DC. You have probably heard of it. The sermon of the Episcopal bishop of Washington, Mariann Edgar Budde, is definitely worthwhile to watch or read as a whole.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwwaEuDeqM8>

The bishop condemned what she called the culture of contempt that threatens a peaceful living together. She mentioned honesty and humility as core Biblical values for those who are in power.

And she ended with a plea directed towards president Trump himself. A plea to have mercy with those who now feel scared because of his manifesto, mentioning in particular members of the LGBTQ+ community and the millions of illegal migrants who now face deportation. (What a terrible word to use the day before Holocaust Memorial Day.) So all in all, she spoke in the prophetic tradition of Isaiah and indeed of Jesus. And as we could expect, she now faces the same kind of fury that they faced. We can all imagine what this looks like in our times of social media hate storms.

Reading today's Gospel right in a week when this took place makes it even more poignant. The manifestation of Jesus continues to stir people in different directions. He urges us to make a choice. As followers of him, we should be prepared to raise our prophetic voices when it comes to the values of his kingdom. If needed, facing all the opposition that might come with it. So may today's scripture continues to be fulfilled, not only by the way we are hearing it, but also by the way we are living it out in our words and deeds and indeed in all the meditations of our hearts. Amen