

Epiphany is a season about proclamation and the power of God at work in God's people. It is also a season when the church examines its life and witness and how it understands itself to be the incarnated Christ planted in a local community.

*“The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness –
on them light has shined.”*

Epiphany is a time of recognition; the recognition that Jesus Christ is present, “*incarnate*”, born into the world, made flesh, affirming our humanity. The Light of the world! That's the main theme of Epiphany.

There is also another theme of Epiphany: **repentance**:

Repentance is often thought of as private, personal, nobody else's business, between us and God alone. Well, repentance also has a corporate nature to it. In the reading from First Corinthians today, we hear Paul chiding those who have divided loyalties. He points out to the Corinthians, and to us, how this mocks the Good News. A church that is divided is not a witness to the gospel, and is subject to public ridicule. Saint Paul knew the devil to be at work here, and that division was the antithesis of proclamation. But isn't division always someone else's fault!!

And finally, that other theme of Epiphany: **the Call**.

“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

Jesus came to these men as they were going about their lives, as they were going about the daily business of making a living. Not one of them was engaged in an activity that was particularly religious.

Jesus has come to God's people with the same straight-forward invitation from that day to this. Through the centuries, Jesus has called all sorts and conditions of folk – famous **and** unheralded. In our own time, Jesus calls and people to drop whatever they are doing to follow him. Jesus' invitation is compelling **because** it issues out of God's love. Jesus' invitation calls us into community with God and with each other. It urges us to reach beyond our comfortable selves, to risk pushing the limits. When we accept Jesus'

invitation, we find that, along with all those who have gone before, we are transformed.

We follow because, among other things, we long to have our lives make sense. It is imperative for us to know that our lives have a purpose higher than ourselves. In and through Jesus, we see God's love mediated to us in new and compelling ways. God's love assures us that our lives do, in fact, have a higher purpose; higher even than we would ever dare to dream. What fits and equips us to live out that higher purpose is God's love. As we follow Jesus, we are transformed. With every grace-filled day, we are reshaped into new creatures. With every passing day, we are becoming the persons God created us to become.

The message of Jesus is a simple one. **Repent!** *“Turn from your sin, and turn to God, because the kingdom of heaven is near.”*

There is a story told about *Leonardo da Vinci's* famous painting of the Last Supper. *Leonardo* searched far and wide for what he considered to be an ideal model for each person in the scene. He began with a fine-looking young man, full of vitality, and chose him as a perfect model for Jesus. He followed with other models for each of the apostles, and the work took quite a while. He left Judas till last, not knowing who could represent him. Finally, he came across a tramp sleeping rough, whom he thought that would probably sell his soul for money. *Leonardo* persuaded him to come to his studio. While the work was in progress, both of them came to the same realisation. This man had been in the same studio before, representing Jesus; but he had gone astray, lost his way, and was now destitute. It was a shock to *de Vinci*, and a sharp prod to conversion for the man, a new beginning, and a step towards fulfilling God's purpose for him.

Repent has come to mean being sorry for and regret some wrong actions we have done in the past. Jesus, however, is asking for much more than that. It is a call, not to wipe out the past, which is really not possible, but for a change of direction from now on and into the future. The Greek word which is rendered by many translations as ‘repent’ is *metanoia*, (μετάνοια). This word implies a radical change in one's thinking; it means looking at life in a completely new way, making what is now sometimes

called a 'paradigm shift'. This new way of seeing life is spelt out through the whole of the Christian Testament.

It is only when we begin to make this radical change that we begin to become part of that Kingdom, that we begin effectively to come under the influence of God's power in our lives. We begin to see things the way God sees them and our behaviour changes accordingly.

The novelist James Baldwin once wrote, "Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it ... the end of safety." The call to discipleship of these four fishermen, the beginning their story represents, implies the breakup of their familiar world, the end of their safety.

The first disciples left behind old securities: the waterside, the boat, the nets, those days of fishing that so resembled one another, and even old Zebedee, the father of James and John, standing astonished in the boat as his two sons suddenly walk away. The new beginning required this. They were called out from their occupation about which they know a great deal, in order to fish for people, about which they claim no knowledge.

In the same way, our discipleship means a new beginning, one that appears before us again and again. We experience the end of safety so that we may participate in a new world. We find ourselves engaged in an adventure, for however strangely, however unjustifiably, Christ comes to us and chooses us, and sends us out to be the next new beginning in the world. Disciples must walk away into the future. They may be afraid, but not so afraid that their faith does not lead them forward, to make radical change!

"I don't quite know how they will interpret the word 'revolution'", she replied. "For me, 'revolution' simply means radical change." Aung San Suu Kyi

When Christianity came to the Roman Empire it performed perhaps one of the most significant cultural revolutions in the history of the West. In general, Christian values stood directly opposed to those values of classical thought, that is, of the Greco-Roman tradition. This tradition taught that man ought to seek the good life today, here in this world, in the present world, and for the Romans, that meant the Empire. Christianity taught that

our earthly existence was merely a preparation for life after death. Our life on earth was temporary, a stopping off point before the journey into eternal life. The visible world was a world of exile. We are all held as prisoners in Plato's Cave, watching shadows and believing them to be reality.

Einstein would have called that Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Albert Einstein

Christians faced **persecution and their** martyrs have stood as supreme symbols of faith and integrity, and they broke out to the reality of a new Kingdom. That was *Revolution*; which means radical, or fundamental changes to the status quo (though Aristotle allowed for some modification of *what exists!*).

The revolutionary anarchists Mikhail Bakunin and Sergey Nechayev argued in *Catechism of a Revolutionary*:

“The Revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no private interests, no affairs, sentiments, ties, property nor even a name of his own. His entire being is devoured by one purpose, one thought, one passion—the revolution. Heart and soul, not merely by word but by deed, he has severed every link with the social order and with the entire civilized world; with the laws, good manners, conventions, and morality of that world. He is its merciless enemy....”

Actually doesn't all this sound familiar to the Christian!

And the Marxist revolutionary *Che Guevara* said this about revolutionaries:

“At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love.... We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity will be transformed into actual deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a moving force.”

This is a time of great change and uncertainty around the world as we confront difficulties such as climate change, migration of people across the

planet and conflict spreading in many places, a new President in the United States who has attracted extraordinary reactions. In the European context, we see many of these issues finding expressions on our streets and these are indeed a cause for prayers for unity. With so many global and local issues confronting all of us every day, the Church's witness needs to be strong and clear. We need to be resolute in standing together to witness to a Christ-centred Church, in standing with those on the margins who have no voice and no power.

Because the love of Christ urges us on, because he died for us all, so that we might live no longer for ourselves, but for him.

2Cor 5. 14ff

Let us join HIS revolution.