

Pastor Jon's January 3, 2021 Sermon using the Day of Epiphany Texts

Text: Ephesians 3:1-12 and Matthew 2:1-2

As we enter 2021, what did you learn about yourself in 2020? What has been revealed about you through these challenging times? It is good or bad? What did you realize that you need to do more or less of in 2021?

One of the things I do with couples in pre-marital counseling to help with assertiveness and active listening is called the wish list. I have each person write down 3 things they would like more or less of from their partner in the marriage. Some responses are as simple as I wish you would pick up after yourself. Other ones go much deeper. So for that person who has a hard time asking for what they want in the relationship, this is a hard exercise. They hem and haw, wondering if they should say it or not. For those who have no trouble asking for what they want, they scribble the answer and twiddle their thumbs as they wait.

If we are honest with ourselves, the pandemic has brought out our best and worst traits. I feel I have had less patience lately and have taken it out on those closest to me. So, one of the things I do each year is pick a word to live into. My word for the year is patience.

Or like in the new Disney Pixar Movie, Soul, you discovered your "spark" - the thing that gives you passion or makes you tick.

These days, just to have a plan for the day is a huge success. To take a shower and get dressed for the day is an accomplishment. I have been on vacation at home for a week. I might do a little snow blowing, do a project, go ice fishing, watch sports... but nothing all that earth shattering. We did plan a trip to Title Town for tubing and skating, Packer Pro shop, and Krolls Burgers. That was fun.

This week, we see in our lessons that Jesus is for the whole world. As we enter the season of epiphany, or the "I should have had a V8" time of the church year, the epiphany or manifestation of God that is being revealed is that Jesus' birth invites people from all

over the world, including all Gentiles, to participate in his Kingdom.

In our Ephesians lesson, written under the Apostle Paul's name, Paul speaks of the mystery of Christ's grace being revealed to him and all the apostles and prophets. The mystery being revealed is that, "the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

The good news is that Jews and Gentiles can now a part of the same body sharing in the promise of the gospel... the good news of Jesus Christ.

Paul says in Ephesians that the church possesses the wisdom of this mystery.

In our Gospel from Matthew, we have a final example of God's inclusiveness in Jesus Christ. Wise men, or astronomers from the east, gentile foreigners, saw a star of wonder that they inquired about. You know the story, they saw the star in the West and followed it to Jerusalem. There, they found out that the prophets predicted the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. King Herod found out about the magi and secretly employed them to find the Messiah. When the wise men saw where the star had stopped, they encounter Mary and the baby Jesus. The scriptures said when they saw Jesus, their hearts were filled with joy. Here, foreigners, Gentiles from the East have been changed by Jesus. Their joy turned into action. They knelt down, a form of worship, and gave their best gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Then in a dream they were warned about Herod's motivations to destroy Jesus so they went home by another road. I think this is a metaphor our faith... taking another road. Yes, we will mess up. Leave people out. And turn in on ourselves.

But today, like the wise men, we have encountered Jesus in the Word, fellowship, and sacrament. We heard that God's grace is sufficient for us. We are forgiven from all the times we leave others out and set free to leave as changed people... to walk by a different road.