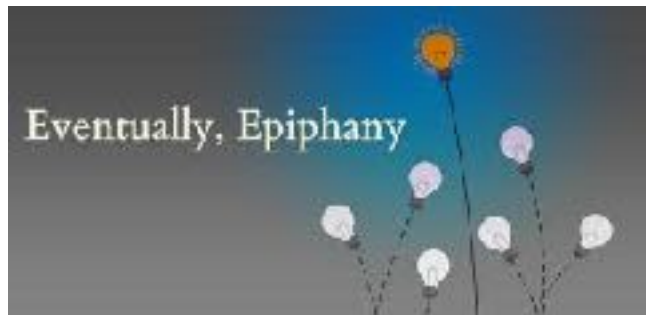


Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
Sunday, January 19, 2020  
Second Sunday after Epiphany  
The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday

*“Epiphanies Announcing to the World the Coming of  
Light, New Life, and Salvation”*

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

Hebrew Scripture: Isaiah 49:1-7  
Christian Scripture: John 1:29-42



Friends, welcome to our second of six sermons this Christian season entitled “Eventually, Epiphany”. Last week we heard from Bonnie Girvan who told us of an epiphany she had while driving! She had an experience wherein she realized while cursing another driver for an infraction that the other driver was her, or the same as she, as they both came from the “same source”.



Bonnie realized that she and the other driver, as Martin Luther King, Jr. once stated, were “inter-related[, that] all [people] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly...This is the inter-related structure of reality”.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, “Letter from Birmingham City Jail (1963)”, in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington, (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 1986. pp. 289-302.

Epiphanies are ‘Ah Ha!’ moments of spiritual insight when we experience God’s wisdom. Having an epiphany is to have a ‘lightbulb moment’ when the Holy Spirit reveals to us something that which God knows and wishes to convey to us.



Recall last week when I suggested that perhaps the greatest epiphany that can be experienced is the one when we die and are reunited, becoming one, with our Creator. I preached that I believe that all of us who seek God will *eventually* experience this type of epiphany. Hence, this sermon series is entitled, ‘Eventually, Epiphany’.



Last week, we learned that one type of epiphany is experienced through a ‘theophany’. Few people have experienced a theophany. I

have never experienced a theophany. A theophany is an experience when God, or a manifestation of God, is visibly seen (and heard).



Moses kind of saw and heard God, the great “I Am”, in the burning bush and Moses saw God’s ‘glory’ while shielding himself in a mountain cleft.



Remember, the Holy Spirit descended and alighted over Jesus during his baptism and God’s voice was heard declaring, “This is my son, with whom I am well pleased”?

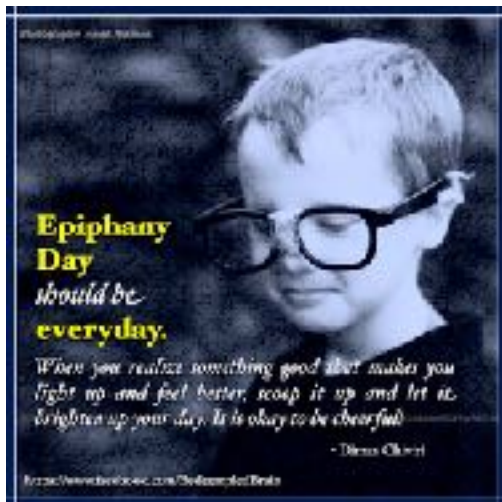
Today, we will hear from the Reverend Lee Moore, a beautiful friend of our church, as he relates to you a ‘theophanic epiphany’ he once experienced.<sup>2</sup> Lee experienced an assurance of the afterlife when his sister unexpectedly died during a surgical procedure. Interestingly,

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<sup>2</sup> Yes, that is a neologism of mine.

rather than teaching him something completely new, Lee's epiphany confirmed in a powerful way something he had always believed.

My first hearing of Lee's experience leads me to comment on epiphanies in a manner more nuanced than I was able last week. I believe there are two crucial aspects to epiphanies.



One, epiphanies are often not events or experiences that reveal to us wisdom *for the first time*.

**The true beauty of epiphanies and revelations is that they can happen anywhere or anytime.**

Rather, epiphanies often have always been revealed to us many times before, or in fact had *always* been revealed to us, we just did not or

were not able to ever receive the message. The signal was always there, there was just no reception.



Two, if we did receive the message, we understood it intellectually, cognitively, or cerebrally - but we did not *feel* it, we did not experience the knowledge, deep within our bones. For example, when Ezekiel ate the word of God he *felt* it ‘tasted’ like honey!). You see, to know the word of God is to feel, or experience, the Word of God - it is the knowing *and* the feeling of knowledge that change you forever.



The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who I quoted in our service bulletin and earlier in this message, I believe, experienced an epiphany. The epiphany related to his own death the next day and it was accompanied by the profound assurance of God that King’s truth

preached all those years, and thus God's truth, will go marching-on and the kingdom of God will be made manifest in the world.



On the third of April 1968, King addressed congregants at the Bishop Charles Mason Temple in Memphis, Tennessee. King was there to lead a strike being carried out by sanitation workers. King's objective in his speech was to engender solidarity in those who were not sanitation workers for the strikers.



He sought to communicate to the nation the same epiphany that Bonnie had: that we are all caught-up in a “web of mutuality”. At the end of his address, King recalled that years ago a demented woman stabbed him in New York at a book-signing. If the blade travelled just a few millimetres more, he would have drowned in his own blood that

day. King believed his life was spared so that he could continue his ministry. However, like Jesus on the night of his betrayal, King concluded his remarks in Memphis by alluding to the fact that his ministry would soon end.



King said, “It really doesn’t matter what happens now”. King explained how his flight from Atlanta to Memphis was delayed to ensure that no one mechanically tampered with the plane or placed an explosive device on it. “Then I got to Memphis,” King recalled. “And some began to say that the threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from one of our sick white brothers? Well, I don’t know what [specifically] will happen to me now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it does not matter with me now. Because I’ve been to the mountain-top. And I don’t mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the Promised Land. I



may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the coming of the Lord."<sup>3</sup>



King had an epiphany that night in Memphis. King knew he would die. And he did the next day.



But King experienced an epiphany that assured him that his cause was just.

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<sup>3</sup> The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, "I See the Promised Land" (3 April 1968), in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington, (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 1986), pp. 279-286.



Friends, tonight, perhaps before you go to sleep, read for yourself our scripture this morning from Isaiah (49:1-7).



Ask yourself, “Was Jesus not God’s servant?”



Also re-read the scripture from John’s gospel read and ask yourself, “Was not the martyr Peter [also known as ‘Simon’ and ‘Cephas’<sup>4</sup>] this

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<sup>4</sup> Meaning “Rock”.

servant?” Then ask yourself, based on what you have heard this morning, “Was not Dr. King *also* this servant?”



And finally ask yourself, “Am I not also called to be that servant?”

Then pray that you experience your calling, *eventually*.

This is the Word of God, and it was delivered to the people of God, and the people of God responded, “Amen”.