

## Epiphany 3A

January 22nd, 2017

Church of the Ascension -- Seattle

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[Isaiah 9:1-4](#)

[Psalm 27:1, 5-13](#)

[1 Corinthians 1:10-18](#)

[Matthew 4:12-23](#)

### *Bending the Arc*

These last few months have been some of the most turbulent and confusing times of my adult life. The world many of us have known feels like it is coming apart at the seams and being cast aside in some kind of judgement. There are days when it feels like the air we breathe is being replaced with two parts of gloom for every one part of hope. A light does shine in the darkness, but I have to confess. There are times, I wonder if someone is heaping ashes onto that light, hoping to extinguish it as quickly as possible.

...and yet...I trust with all of my being that God does find a way to break through chaos, transforming havoc into hope. Since the beginning of time, generations of God's people have found themselves in this same place, wondering whether hate is stronger than love...whether fear really could win out over hope. It is in those moments of doubt that God finds a way to remind us that love always does win, even when that love seems almost impossibly far away.

As this morning's Gospel opens, Jesus finds himself in a very similar place. He has just emerged from the waters of baptism ready to bring God's ministry into the world. But before he can begin, he encounters a desert full of temptation and a world ready to silence anyone who challenges those in power.

While the season of Epiphany celebrates the light of Christ in the world, it also reveals something else. *This season*, the light of Christ casts a bright spotlight on the shadows and the brokenness of our world and our lives.

For the last couple of weeks, the Gospels have focused on discipleship. In the Gospels, we learn how to become the light of Christ in the midst of this broken and hurting world. Discipleship is about a way of life. Discipleship is also about the choices we make. Discipleship begins when we discover who and what centers the way of life we lead. Do we choose a way of life grounded in the world or rooted in heaven? Do we place ultimate trust in ourselves or in something far beyond ourselves?

After his baptism, Jesus wrestled with these same questions. His choices show us one way to engage during this unique and challenging moment in history.

When Jesus wandered through the wilderness, he was tempted by the allure of earthly treasures. Jesus could have succumbed to all those temptations. He could have given in the promise of earthly power and prestige. He could have emerged from the desert, claiming he alone could fix the world's problems.

But Jesus chose another way.

When Jesus emerged from the wilderness, he discovered that the prophet John had been arrested. Jesus could have decided that God's mission was too dangerous. He could have relied on others to carry out the ministry of God's reconciliation. He could have fled deeper into the badlands of the Judean desert, trying to escape from God and from his fellow neighbors.

But Jesus chose another way.

When Jesus emerged from his baptism and wilderness adventure, he chose to embrace the goodness of God and humanity. He chose to live in a way that affirmed this goodness. He said **YES** to God's mission of reconciliation, and he sought out companions to share in this same way of life. Those are the same choices that are set before us this day. How Jesus responded reflects how we, as Christians, are called to respond as well.

For the last few days, I have been pondering one of Martin Luther King statements. In 1965, Dr. King marched from Selma to Montgomery, demanding equal voting rights for all people. As that march was concluding, Dr. King told his fellow marchers that "while the arc of the moral universe is long, the arc always bends toward justice."<sup>1</sup> King's words have given me some solace. At the same time, King's proclamation serves as a challenge to anyone of faith.

The moral universe does not bend on its own. For any movement to occur, we must participate in bringing about the change. Together with God, we can bend that arc of the universe toward a justice rooted in the love of God. To do that, we must commit to follow Jesus, and we must commit to difficult work of reconciliation.

Our hope is not found in taking the safe or easy route. Our hope does not depend on staying quiet and refusing to rock the boat when the Great Commandments are violated or the goodness of creation is threatened. Our hope is not helped in when we assume someone else will respond for us or in ceding our responsibility to others.

Nor is our hope found by placing trust solely in ourselves. When we rely on ourselves exclusively, we place ourselves head of God. We trap traps God in the confines of our limited imaginations. We can never fully know the mind the God nor can we can fully know the breadth

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<sup>1</sup><https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/our-god-marching>

and depth of God's love. As +Rickel said earlier this week, when we claim to know God fully, we commit heresy of the worst kind.

Instead, our hope rests in the living God most fully revealed through Jesus. The incarnation of Christ reveals a perfect partnership between God and God's creation. That partnership is not exclusively carried out in heavenly realms beyond our reach. The Good News of the Gospel is that we are invited into that partnership. In Christ and with Christ, we become partners with God in the renewal and reconciliation of this world. For that partnership to work though, we must choose to follow of Christ. We must become the hands and feet of Christ in this world.

Jesus proclaims the kingdom of heaven has come near. That nearness is not at some undetermined point in the future. Instead, the kingdom of God is as close as the person sitting next to you and in the breath you take right now. The proximity of God is also about recognizing the importance and sacredness of every moment. Dr. King called this "fierce urgency of now."<sup>2</sup>

The disciples understood that fierce urgency. When Jesus called them, their responses were immediate and unequivocal. They left the comfort of their professions, safety of their homes, and love of their families to follow Jesus. They risked their own lives, so the arc of the universe could bend toward God's justice and love.

Jesus calls each of us with that same urgency:

"Follow me," Jesus says to each of us, and together we will bring healing to a world that seeks unity and love, not hate and division.

"Follow me," Jesus says to each of us, and together we will respect all peoples of the world, affirming our shared common dignity and basic right to exist.

"Follow me," Jesus says to each of us, and together we will bend the moral arc of universe toward God's justice.

"Follow me," Jesus says to each of us, and together we will turn the world rightside up, grounded and rooted in the love of God.

Jesus *is* calling. It's time to respond!

AMEN!

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm>