

Shine The Light

January 21, 2018

Epiphany is about bringing the light of our own invisible divine nature into the light of the world. The Christian tradition is unique for its theology of the incarnation. The divine takes on flesh and blood. Spirit takes on nature, skin becomes the body of God. In our Christian story, the person of Jesus is this icon or image of God in the flesh. He is for Christians, the model of a man who brought the light of God through his own life into the world.

In the naivety of Christian zeal and evangelism, it seems that we feel we are supposed to mimic Jesus or be like Jesus and not be ourselves. Some people have gone as far as grow their hair out, dawn sandals and Mediterranean dress for the purpose of “being like Jesus.” This concept has led to all kinds of religious radicalism and loss of authentic self.

When Jesus invited others to follow him, he was not inviting them to be like him, he was inviting them to be like themselves, as God created them to be. He was calling them to discover the kingdom of God within so that they may bring the kingdom of God forth into the world.

When I began to read the bible in a serious and personal way I discovered who the person of Jesus was in his day. He was not at all like I was lead to believe. He was not the morality police. He was not a suppressor of humanity but a liberator of persons. Those who were shamed and demoted by culture and society, he lifted, like Zaccheus, the woman accused of adultery, the Samaritans, Gentiles, the lepers, women and children, the poor, and the multitudes. He honored those whom his society and religion had dishonored. He embraced those who had been turned away.

Jesus was not a cult leader. He did not lead his followers to suffer his cross, but told them they had their own cross to carry in the future. He did not teach them to blindly follow him but to open their eyes, attune their ears, and awake their minds to the voice of God in their life, to the needs of their neighbor in their community, to the cries of the poor and marginalized in their world. When Jesus became a target of the authorities he yielded himself alone, and did all he could to protect his followers that they may live out their own calling and purpose in life.

He did not seek popularity or position, on the contrary, he sent more people away to work out their own journey and pilgrimage with God than he invited to remain. He told them the kingdom of God resided in them and they were to discover how their own life could manifest the kingdom of God. He taught his followers to avoid the high places of position and power but instead seek the places of service and humility. The world, he taught, was not created for people to exploit or amass for their own benefit, but it was made for servants and stewards who chose to give more than they received, who chose to nurture and shepherd instead of consume and pursue. Greatness in God’s kingdom

was not measured by the elevation of one's personal ascent in life, but it was measured by the degree one was willing and able to lay their own life down so that others might simply walk a peaceful life.

Jesus was not a preserver of the status quo or conserver of people's status and privilege, instead he encouraged them to share what they have, give honor to those whom they may have been taught to segregate from or discriminate against. For this reason I do not understand how some invoke the name of Jesus to denigrate whole people groups. It is the life and teachings of Jesus who inspired our own baptismal covenant to "respect the dignity of all human beings. It was Jesus who infuriated those who believed their tradition and religion gave them special privilege or access to God. It was the life and teachings of Jesus that inspired the dream of The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. to dream of the day when "his children would be judged not by the color of their skin but by their character." It was the teachings and life of Jesus that inspired our own Episcopal tradition to challenge our culture and church's systematic condemnation of those who are Gay. It is Jesus pointing to the dignity and goodness and holiness of the marginalized and the hypocrisy, arrogance, and self-righteousness of those who claimed to be "the chosen ones."

Jesus manifested the divine light in his world when he gave his life for the sake of others' wellness, when he lifted people's guilt and shame by lavishly offering them the grace and love of God. Jesus manifested the light of God when he honored others by being with them, sharing a meal, engaging in conversation. Jesus shined the light of God in his world not by consigning people outside of God's love and belonging, but by extending to them God's favor and peace.

It is the season of Epiphany, God's light is being made visible in our world. Each of us are given a measure of that divine light to shine in our own way in our own world, this is the light of the Christ: God in us being in the world. So shine your light.

Amen