

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany
January 15, 2017
Year A

E. Bevan Stanley

From the Gospel: They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This season of ordinary time after the feast of the Epiphany is a time for us reflect on how the assertion that Jesus is Lord affects everyone on the planet in their ordinary lives. I have just finished listening to a series of lectures by the New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson in which he talks about how the first Christians had a direct and powerful experience of the divine, and how that experience was closely linked with the person of Jesus after his death and resurrection. Those first Christians experienced healing and deliverance from mental illness. They experienced God talking through them in prophecy and the Holy Spirit praying through them in tongues. These experiences led them to the earliest statement of faith or creed: Jesus is Lord. The New Testament writings came into existence as these people who shared experiences of divine power tried to understand and explain these experiences. Johnson points out that the earliest documents show that “the central symbol is that of the Holy Spirit: They were touched by a personal, transcendent, transforming energy that came from God, not from themselves.” Second, their “basic conviction is that “Jesus is Lord”: The power touching them comes from a man who had died by state execution but now shares the life of God and communicates that life to others.” All the texts of the New Testament and early Church and all the doctrinal statements derive from this experience of the divine in their lives.

So it is in our time. It is exactly this experience of the divine in the risen Lord Jesus that makes Christianity the largest religion on the planet today and that keeps it growing around the world. If this is so, and I believe it is, the question for us, who are Episcopalian Christians in the

United States, is Do I have a direct, personal experience of divine power that is connected with the living Jesus? Have I experienced God's power changing me? Have I experienced healing, forgiveness, or emancipation from bondage? Does my relationship with Jesus make my life richer, fuller, more complete, healthier, more whole, more powerful, more peaceful, or more joyful? Do we seek and receive guidance from God? Are we committed to conforming ourselves to the image of Christ?

Alinda and I just saw the movie "Hacksaw Ridge." It is a movie about the courage of a conscientious objector during the second World War who wants to serve his country as an unarmed medic. He undergoes much hardship and abuse during basic training. He is considered a freak and coward. He is bullied and court-martialed for disobedience when he won't handle a gun of any kind. When he gets to the Pacific theater, he is part of company of soldiers assigned to attack and take a high position from the Japanese. Amidst the horrors and butchery of that battle, he carries one wounded soldier after another to safety. When the everyone else retreats, he stays behind through the night finding wounded soldiers and carrying them to safety. After each one he prays, "Help me to get one more." He only stops when he himself is wounded. In the end he saves seventy-five wounded soldiers. He is the only conscientious objector to receive the Medal of Honor. It reminded me of an English teacher I had in high school who was a Quaker who served as medic in combat. He lost his left hand.

Some Christians hear a clear voice guiding them in their choices. Others receive only gentle prompting. For some divine guidance comes through other people or the Bible or circumstances. But in all cases we are striving to serve God's purposes and become the people God intends us to be.

This text from John is a good example of this. Consider the repetitive use of the word *meno* in this passage. This word is translated as “stay,” “dwell,” or “remain,” depending on the context. The reading is a continuation of the account of events at the Jordan River when John baptized Jesus.

John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! . . . And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained (meno) on him. Meno. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain (meno) is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' Thus Jesus is identified as the man who lives with the Holy Spirit, or who lives as if God were inside him.

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying (meno)?" He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying (meno), and they remained (meno) with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

The point seems to be that these disciples wanted to get a closer look at what living with the divine power looked like. They, too, wanted to experience life with the Holy Spirit and knew they could do this by living with Jesus.

As a church, we are a community of people touched by divine power. We are called out, elected, chosen to support one another in this living with and in Christ. We follow and derive our strength from one who has defeated death itself. We empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Breath of God, the divine wind. We share our stories of encounter with divine

power in and through Jesus. We see ourselves as a locus of divine love that is called to change the world and to establish a realm of justice and peace, to build the Kingdom of God. As the collect today puts it, we are called to “shine with the radiance of Christ’s glory.” Hear these words, written some years ago, but very appropriate for this time, from Steven Charleston, a Native American bishop in the Episcopal Church, and one who indeed knows the power of God in Jesus:

You are needed for what is to come, for the struggle against fear, the turning point toward peace, that is why you are here, in the place you are, among the people you call community, to be a wise counselor and a calming presence, to invite others to work together, amid the pulls to extreme, against the rush to partisan, you are a center of hope, a balance of compassion and common sense, that will help to halt the rise of anger, and allow reason to guide the tiller of tomorrow, that is why you are here: you are needed for what is to come.

We are Christians. We live with Jesus. We the Holy Spirit lives in us. The challenge for us in 2017 is will anyone notice? Will others look at us and say where do you live? What gives you this peace and joy and power that we see in you? And we will say, “Come and see.”

Let us go and seed where Jesus is staying, and remain with him today and every day.