

McCabe United Methodist Church

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Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12

“An Apostrophe?”

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On Wednesday we will celebrate the beginning of the season of Epiphany. The writer, Shelley Sanders provides us with a delightful definition of “epiphany.” From Steven Spielberg’s film *Hook*—the 1991 sequel to the story of Peter Pan, featuring Dustin Hoffman, Robin Williams and Julia Roberts.

As Captain Hook pursues the elusive Peter Pan to repay him for “the crocodile incident” which resulted in Hook gaining his hook, he suddenly has a momentary glimpse of the purpose of his life. He cautiously confides this to Smee, his loyal but bumbling first mate.

“Smee! Smee! I’ve just had a sublime vision,” says Hook. “All the jagged parts of my life have come together to form a complete and mystical whole. . .An epiphany.”

“Epipha what?” Smee mutters, and Hook goes on to explore the revelation. Later in the same scene, the impressionable Smee sets down a golden goblet that rings like a bell as it touches the table. He too, it seems, has been gifted with a moment of eternal clarity. As a light goes on in his eyes, he tries to share Hook’s discernment of the sublime: “I’ve just had an. . . apostrophe!” He exclaims!

“Apostrophe, indeed!” Hook mutters with evident exasperation, “I think you mean an epiphany.”

We have not come to celebrate an apostrophe, however, an exclamation point might be close to expressing an epiphany. Yes, Christ has come into the world! Light has shined into our darkness! We’ve come to celebrate an Epiphany!

Now epiphany may not be a familiar concept to everybody. But epiphany is a season of the church year that begins with the coming of the wise men following a light.

The symbol of light is an appropriate one as we begin this, one of the darkest months of the year. Light is a symbol used all through the scriptures. Christ is seen as the light of the world. This idea came into expression way back in the days of the prophet Isaiah. Read Isaiah 60:1-6.

The great good news, is that our light has come. Jesus the Christ is our light and in him is no darkness at all. Read Matthew 2:1-12.

The light of Jesus shines into our puzzled minds. That one of the first things I want to note. In that sense, Jesus is our epiphany. There is so much about life we do not understand apart from Jesus the Christ.

There was a cartoon in the *New Yorker* paper a few years back. It shows a middle-class man, in his living room, watching TV. On the screen is a large pot, and a voice behind the pot says, “How much would you pay for all the secrets of the universe?”

Well, how much would you pay for all the secrets of the universe? We need to acknowledge as Paul does in Ephesians that life is a mystery. But in the midst of that mystery, in the midst of that darkness, there is a light shining! It is the light of Jesus Christ.

An important and troubling question is whether life has any meaning for us? Because for many people today, life does not. For many life is random.

For us as Christians, our faith in Jesus Christ makes an entirely different statement to the world. Life is not random. We are not victims. Life has meaning. It has purpose. Oh, we may see through a glass dimly, as Paul once wrote, but there is a divine plan to it all, and that divine plan is somehow wrapped up in that mysterious, yet magnetic man from Nazareth. He is the light for our puzzled minds.

Jesus is also light for our troubled hearts. An emotionally disturbed man went to see a noted psychiatrist. He confessed he was frustrated, depressed and desperate. The psychiatrist probed. Finally, after a lengthy consultation, the psychiatrist remembered there was a circus in town. He recommended that the troubled man go see the circus.

“Particularly make note of the clown,” the psychiatrist said to the depressed man, “He will make you laugh, and you will feel better.”

The disturbed man blurted out, “but Doctor, I am the clown!” Yes, even a clown can know what it is to have a troubled heart.

In “The Wizard of Oz,” a young Judy Garland sang a song that became popular as it deeply touched the hearts of millions of movie-goers: “Somewhere over the rainbow dreams come true. . .” As it speaks to the desires of troubled hearts. People who long to escape to some faraway place where problems “melt like lemon drops.” That distant Shangri-la where blue birds fly over the rainbow, and Garland asks, “Why, oh why, can’t I?” The cry of the heart for rest and spiritual satisfaction. There are times when all of us know what it is to dream of happiness somewhere over the rainbow because our own lives are filled with darkness and dread. Which shows of our need to see a light shining in our darkness.

Dr. David Seamonds, pastor of the Wilmore, Ky United Methodist Church during the time I was in seminary, once told of a very troubled young man named Mike who came to see him. After a time, they got to the source of Mike’s problems. Mike’s father was a very harsh disciplinarian. To punish Mike whenever he did any childish wrong, his father would shut him up inside a little room in the barn. There he would beat him severely with a belt until Mike was screaming for mercy, crying for his mother and his brothers and sisters to come and let him out. He’d run for the door of the barn, but his father would get there first and stand at the door barring the way. He would then order Mike, “Say you’re sorry.” He would repeat this over and over again, until the hysterical little boy would finally say he was sorry. Then his father would force Mike to embrace and kiss him.(David A. Seamonds, *Putting Away Childish Things* Wheaton: Victor Books, 1984)

Dr. Seamonds tells how through prayer and pastoral counseling Mike was able to relive and be delivered from these hurtful experiences that were still alive in his subconscious. Dr. Seamonds calls this the healing of memories. As we begin this New Year, perhaps there are some of us who need that kind of release, a healing of the memories. Christ can do that for us. He is light for our puzzled minds, and for our troubled hearts. And when that happens - yes there is an epiphany!

Jesus is also the light for our defeated spirits. Some years back there was a quarterback of the Green Bay Packers named Bart Starr. Starr once told about a little incentive

scheme he had going with his oldest son, Bart, Jr. For every perfect paper Bart, Jr., brought home from school, his dad would give him ten cents. Of course, a dime went farther back then than it does now.

After a particularly rough game against St. Louis, in which football legend Bart Starr felt he performed poorly, he returned home weary and battered after a long plane ride. But he couldn't help feeling better when he returned to his bedroom. There, attached to his pillow, was a note: "Dear Dad, I thought you played a great game. Love, Bart." Taped to the note were two dimes. ("When the Pack was Back and the Payoff Was in Dimes." *The Christian Athlete*, Jan. 1977)

We all need a little encouragement at times. Maybe the past year was a great year for you - then we would celebrate with you. But maybe this past year has been rough. Perhaps some of us need somebody to put their hand on our shoulder and help us restore positive feelings about ourselves. My friends, Jesus the Christ seeks to offer the encouragement we need. Remember the words of the prophet Isaiah - "Arise! Shine! Your light has come!"

In, "*Farewell To Fear*" Nelson L. Price tells of an impoverished widow awaiting eviction. She was way behind in her rent payments. Her utilities had been turned off and her eviction notice received.

There was a knock on her door. She cowered inside in absolute silence. The doors were locked and drapes drawn. Filled with terror, she heard the knock again. She assumed it was the officials who had come to repossess her properties and put her out on the street. The knocking ceased. She gained a sense of relief. Had she had the courage to answer the knock, she would have found things totally different. The knock was by her pastor. Through the grace of friends he had accumulated enough money to pay her utilities and rent. He had come to share the good news and offer her the relief she needed.

Yes, friends, whether you experience life's good times right now or if you are struggling with life right now, know there is a friend knocking at the door of your life. Someone who wants to celebrate with you or to shine light into your troubled lives. The light is shining for you.

This is your epiphany.

- Let that light shine into your mind,
- let it shine into your heart, and
- let it shine into your defeated spirit.

Arise, shine, our light has come!

Thanks be to God!