

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
Sunday, January 12, 2020
First Sunday after Epiphany (Monday, January 5, 2020)

“Our Spiritual Light-Bulb Moments”

The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

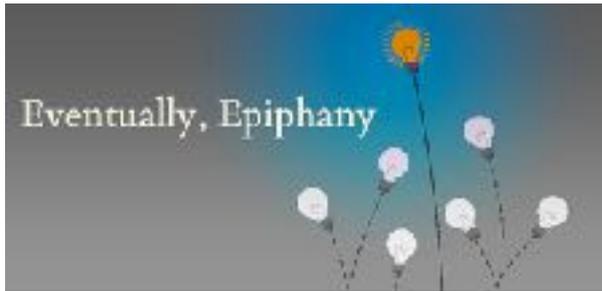
**Hebrew Scripture: Isaiah 42:1-9
Christian Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17**



Outside our church, on the front façade is a large banner that declares to all on Main Street, “God Is Still Speaking,”.



So, a key question one might ask is: “Through whom is God speaking?”
The answer this Epiphany season is: “‘God is still speaking’ through us,
through all of you”.



During this Epiphany season, we will hear God speaking through you in our sermon series entitled “Eventually, Epiphany”. Each week for six weeks, we will invite members, beginning with Bonnie Girvan, to tell us of an epiphany experience whereby God has communicated to them. They will share the wisdom of God as conveyed to them in a moment of insight, a moment during which, for no particular reason, a light-bulb went on in their heart and mind and they learned a lesson that was not *taught to* them, but rather was *caught by* them. We will hear stories about how the Holy Spirit communicated to them a divine truth that our brothers and sisters have not forgotten and wish to share with us.



Another motto of our church is: “Never place a period where God has placed a comma!” This mantra is similar to that of “God is still speaking,”. It means that which we can learn from God is communicated to us by God as much in the present and future as it was in the past. God’s wisdom is not incarcerated within the canon, the Bible. That which God communicates is not exclusively conveyed through the Bible.



God, through the Holy Spirit, continues to speak to us, reminding us of old truths and teaching us new truths. So, the Bible is not a period, but rather a comma. Think about it this way: If we believe that God is alive, and if we believe that we are in relationship with God, doesn't it make sense that God continues to speak to us and reveal old things to us in new ways or continues to reveal new things to us in new ways?

How does God still speak? What follows the comma (the Bible)?

Epiphany (e-piph-a-ny)

(n) A moment of sudden revelation; a poignant, sudden, profound understanding of something.

Epiphanies. Epiphanies are moments when we experience God, and God can be experienced in many ways. Perhaps the greatest epiphany that one can experience is the one when we die and we are reunited, we become one, with our Creator. I believe that all of us who seek God will experience this type of epiphany. Hence, this sermon series is entitled, “Eventually, Epiphany”.

Another epiphany which few experience is a ‘theophany’.

THEOPHANY
A VISIBLE MANIFESTATION OF GOD

That’s when God is visually seen. Moses saw God in the burning bush (Exodus 3) and he saw God’s backside while sheltering in a mountain cleft (Exodus 33:12-18). Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1) also had pretty rare and intense visual theophany.



Those who were being baptized by John with Jesus also experienced an audio-visual ‘theophanic epiphany’ (yes, that phrase is a neologism, but I will take the liberty of creating it as once a professor told me only in jest that only PhD’s are permitted) whereby our scriptures say this morning that “the Spirit of God descended like a dove to alight upon him and a voice was heard saying, ‘This is my Son, my Beloved, on whom my favour rests’” (Matthew 3:16-17).

More common epiphanies are those that are only communicated audibly - like the prophets Elijah (I Kings 19:11-13), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Hosea, and Amos do. The prophets ‘heard’ God communicating messages, that’s why their refrain is most often “Thus saith the Lord!” (Isaiah 44:6).

In our scripture from Isaiah, the prophet told the chosen people of God (Jacob or Israel), by using the personification of a figure called “[my] servant” (Isaiah 41:8), that they are to be examples to the world.

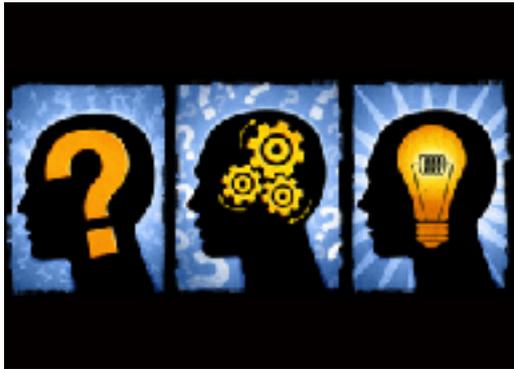


God communicated through Isaiah in this morning's reading that they are to tell their story of faith to the world. God compels Isaiah to tell the people, "I have formed you and appointed you to be a light to all peoples, a beacon to the nations" (Isaiah 42:6). God's intention is not that just Isaiah be saved, and not just Israel be saved, but that the entire world be saved.



And so it is with you, all of you. God wants you to be a light to all people, to be a beacon to all people. So, it is right and good that you communicate that God-given wisdom that you have learned and thus share it with others so that others will also be saved with you.

Thus far, none of our epiphanies are complete perfect reunions with God that only happen when we die. Most of our epiphanies are not visual glimpses of God's backside or seeing the Holy Spirit descend. Very few of our epiphanies are of the audible 'thus Saith the Lord' type.



Most of our epiphanies are instead insights or 'light bulb moments' when we for some reason realize, perhaps for the first time, something spiritual. Most epiphanies are small, but not insignificant.



In addition to being small, epiphanies can be frequent. In fact, I think God wishes for us to experience epiphanies all the time.



Within the Catholic tradition, saints have a rare connectivity enabling them to frequently experience manifestations of God.



Yet, epiphanies are not limited to saints. The Holy Spirit is democratic, and egalitarian. All of us have the capacity to experience epiphanies - and most, if not all of us, do!

If we are open to the Spirit of God, all encounters in Creation, in the environment, can lead to epiphanies. All fellowship and conversations with others can lead to epiphanies. Time spent with your partner, wife, or husband can lead to epiphanies. Every meal with your children and every bedtime story with your grandchildren can and should lead to epiphanies.



It's not unbiblical, if we read the Song of Solomon, to claim that even sex leads to epiphanies. If we are open and breathing the spirit of God, art, and music, and literature all lead to epiphanies. It is only when we shut ourselves off and see our world as secular, that we lose the capacity to see and hear God communicating with us daily.

As people of faith within the Christian tradition, we believe that only Jesus Christ and only Jesus Christ had the perfect ability throughout his life to experience epiphanies - to the point where Jesus became and is THE epiphany.



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