

EPIPHANY 5C 2025
Immanuel Highlands Episcopal Church
Wilmington, Delaware
February 9, 2025

In the words of Ricky Ricardo, I think I have some 'splainin' to do. We're used to referring to parts of the church year as seasons. In the good old days, the suffix "tide" was used--Eastertide, Whitsuntide. A few years ago, some of us began referring to the time we live in as "covidtide." There were way too many Sundays in that season.

But the tides they are a-changin'. I see some of our markers of church life as events, not seasons. Pentecost is an event, and our official titles for the following weeks use the phrase "after Pentecost." If we counted all those weeks as "Pentecost season" we would say they are *of* Pentecost instead of after.

The same is true today. Epiphany is an event celebrated in the life of the church. It marks the end of the shortest season of the year--Christmastide--with the story of the visit of the magi to the manger in Bethlehem. The Sundays after that date, January 6, are called "after Epiphany." I don't refer to these days as the Epiphany season, for one main reason. It tends to keep our focus on the cute baby, which detracts from Jesus' early ministry. According to the church calendar, he ages some 28 to 30 years in just one week, and that was before microwaves.

Today we hear call stories. There's that dramatic scene in Isaiah's time with the house of God being filled with smoke and the prophet's vision of the immediate presence of God. Isaiah gives us a relative date for his vision. It's the year one of Judah's longest-serving kings died. Uzziah, also known as Azariah, reigned for 52 years. For much of that time, he was a righteous follower of his faith. But power and status did their best (or worst), and he strayed away until, as a consequence, he was afflicted with leprosy and died circa 742 BCE.

Isaiah's description gives us words we repeat whenever we celebrate Holy Eucharist. "Holy, holy, holy . . ." we proclaim as we seek that same nearer presence with God. Although, we probably would hope to not have the same instruments of ordination as the prophet experiences in his vision. Jeremiah said the hand of God touched his lips, signifying putting God's words in the prophet's mouth. Isaiah seems to require a more thorough cleansing, so it's a hot coal on his lips. Personally, I was humbled by a pair of hands on top of my head, along with many others reaching out to touch my arms and shoulders.

I can imagine Isaiah thinking he should have gone fishing that day after he hears what God tells him to say. The words are not easily spoken. But then, the prophetic voice is one that speaks the truth about where present actions will lead, and most in power or authority don't usually like to hear that. I also think that if we read the

prophets, we find many similarities to our own time and choices made by our own leaders. In the words of that great theologian Scooby Doo, "ruh roh."

Paul tells his unique call story to the Corinthians as part of his experience meeting the risen Christ. Paul faces some opposition, since he wasn't one of the original twelve, and even persecuted the early church. The Acts of the Apostles gives us some of his history, telling us that Paul, then-named Saul, stood by as Stephen, the first martyr, was stoned to death.

Of course, Jesus calls his own first disciples by meeting them where they are, where they're doing what they normally do, and turning it into a dramatically changed event. Luke tells this story differently than the other Gospels, although John tells a similar story as a post-resurrection encounter. In both, it's Peter who recognizes who has come to meet him after he sees the outcome of the visit.

Feeling all warm and fuzzy yet with these reminders of how God has come? How about your own story? How, and when, and where, have you found yourselves suddenly in the presence of God in such a way that it changed your life? While I'm tempted to take a microphone down the aisle and randomly pick some to answer that question, I realize that time is brief. So I'll pose another question for your consideration.

When have you been the presence of God, of the risen Christ, in such a way with others that they come to see that God is present with all of us, and that revelation, that epiphany, changes all of our lives? Again, no time for the Phil Donahue moment this morning, but those are questions important to answering the question behind door number three. So Monty Hall is here, too.

Who is God calling us to be, as individuals and as the parish known as Immanuel Highlands, at this time in our life together?

As is the nature of epiphanies, of the manifestation of the presence of God, we might be able to answer the first two questions, even if that answer is "um, not sure." Number three will likely take some time, because the answer will become known as we live as much in the nearer presence of God as we can do in human form.

Then, just when we think we've found an answer, we'll hear a "psst" or feel a tap on the shoulder, to turn our attention to God found in a different place. Also, we'll have to be aware that not everything or everyone demanding our attention is also focusing on God's purpose. So we'll need to meet regularly in this boat at the corner of Riverview and West 17th Streets, taking some time to mend and clean our nets together so we can toss them out where the voice of the Spirit tells us to work.

We may find some form of cleansing, a purifying of our hearts and minds as we go. We may go so far astray that it will take a sudden knocking down in order to help us change directions. Then again, the experiences of Isaiah and Paul do not require replication on our part. It's the end result that matters, even more than the number of fish in the net.

The end result is the culmination of our journey together. May it be now, with God, and as we say, ever shall be, together, whenever and wherever the eternal God is made known.