

The Rev. Charlie Holt

I would say, sit down, but you're already sitting down.

Little different. Little different. Morning for us with the, tableau and that glorious, song and the presentation of the gifts with the wise men. I was talking to one of our parishioners, and they were telling me that they were going to miss church today. And I said, well, you're going to miss the big reveal. And I was like, really?

The big reveal? What's that? I said, well, it's Epiphany Day. And that's what the word epiphany means, is God's big reveal. And so, for those of you that are here, you get to be beneficiaries of the big reveal. What is epiphany? It's the revelation of the mystery of God that was hidden, but is now been disclosed.

Through the ministry of the gospel. There was, a professor named William Phelps who was professor of Yale and, and English literature. And one day he was grading papers. This was over the Christmas holiday. And he comes across one of his students papers. It was an essay, test. And the answer that is written under the question is, God only knows the answer to this question.

Merry Christmas.

And so, Professor Phelps, wrote his comment to send back to the student. God gets an a, you get an f. Happy New Year.

On one level, when we think about mysteries, we have a lot of mysteries that, in a sense, are what that is. Is God only knows the answer to this question. And there are plenty of mysteries that are the secret things that are hidden within the counsels of God. And for many, many, centuries, actually, the mystery of how God would save the people of this world had been hinted at.

And there were prophecies and promises that that people could get clues and glimpses that God was going to send a messiah, and that the Messiah would do various things and even as we read in the in the gospel passage for today where the Messiah would be born. It was there were certain things that were that were clues that were disclosed, but they weren't all put together until we looked back after the big reveal of the person and work of Jesus Christ in his gospel message.

Paul in his letter, which you can find in our bulletin, the letter to the Ephesians is talking about this. He says, for this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles, whom we're Gentiles, by the way, means nations. There was the Jewish people, and then there were the Gentiles, the goyim, and Hebrew, the, the nations of the world.

I used to go, to a Jewish deli in Chicago when I was a seminary student. I worked for a, a Jewish man who was an actuary. And I was a, in a sense, the secretary of the office. And he would always send me to the to the Jewish deli to get lunches for all of the people in the office.

And, and so I would order these sandwiches and some of the sandwiches were a little offensive to the, to the people at the deli because it was a kosher deli, they didn't mix dairy with meat and things like that. And so I'd order these sandwiches and people around me and the people behind the counter would judge me. They would say, oh, lettuce and tomato.

One corned beef. That must be for a gentile. And what they meant is a non-Jewish person. And they were they were judging me based on my orders. One time, my, one of my coworkers, he wanted to order the most offensive sandwich. Remember, I'm in Chicago. And so this sandwich is called a New Yorker, and it's, pastrami and Thousand Island dressing and coleslaw and all this stuff.

It sounded pretty good to me, but, I ordered I started ordering this sandwich, and the guy behind the counter, he literally asked me, says, is this a sandwich? The guy that ordered this a jerk.

And I, I said, no, he's a nice guy. Like, is this your boss that ordered this sandwich? It sounds like only a jerk would order a sandwich like this. And it was, you know, not only a gentile sandwich, but it was this sandwich called a New Yorker being ordered in Chicago. So that was a double judgment. But, the Jewish people, in their thinking and in their mindset, did not.

There were hints and clues throughout the pages of Scripture that that God had a plan for the other nations of the world. And, and it goes back all the way to the time of Abraham in Genesis chapter 12, where Abraham is being given the promises and he's being told, you're going to be a great nation. I'm going to give you a great name.

And, and, and your family will be blessed. And that's really the calling of the people of Israel through the person of Abraham. But there was one of the promises to Abraham that was there was a little bit of a clue. It said, through you, all the nations of the world would be blessed. So Genesis chapter 12 and our passages from today, the prophet Isaiah talks about the darkness that is being, driven away by the light which will bring Gentiles into the plan of God.

And he describes, the Gentiles coming like clouds across the sky, just the magnitude of the of the movement of the Gentiles to God. So there were lots of clues, but the manner in which the, the Gentiles would be included in the means by which that was all hidden and a bit of a puzzlement, the way Paul says it is, he says, the mystery was made known to me by revelation.

As I have written briefly when you read this, it was a mystery of Christ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit. So when he's using the word mystery, what he's what he's saying is, this is a mystery that was hidden, that was secret, but has now been disclosed.

The great reveal has happened. This happens in movies all the time. Actually, it's one of the reasons that movies are so fun and exciting and novels and books is because all through the story is it's developed. All of a sudden you'll learn some new thing, some big item, and once you get it, you go, oh, that makes sense.

Of all the other things that I've been reading up to this point. Now, remember in Star Wars, when, Darth Vader says to Luke, I am your father, remember that up to that point, it was just a, pure evil versus good kind of movie. And Luke was the good guy. And Darth Vader was the bad guy.

And there were even some clues about the relationship of Luke to Darth Vader that made Darth Vader seem even worse than he really possibly was. But Darth Vader killed your father is what Obi-Wan said. But then when you have this reveal, I am your father. All of a sudden, all those clues that led up to that moment made, the story change completely.

Suddenly Darth Vader becomes a redeemable character, according to the great hero Luke. And he he he has a different way of looking at him than he had up to that point. All of a sudden. Not only is is Darth Vader somebody that Luke wants to exterminate, but Darth Vader is somebody that Luke wants to redeem. He wants to save them.

And that completely changes the way the story unfolds after that. This is what happens with the revelation of Jesus Christ. The Gentiles are no longer the enemy that we want to exterminate and get rid of and get out of our lives and defeat. But now the Gentiles are those for whom God has redeemed, that he wants to bring into his kingdom.

And so Paul says, this is the big reveal, the listen to the way that he puts it. The mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel that there's no one on this planet now who is outside of the scope for potential redemption and salvation.

Every single person who has ever been born and ever, ever existed, and who is currently alive is now, a target for salvation and for the gospel and for redemption. I have to ask you, is that the way that you look at things? Do you or do you only see, Episcopalians as the potential ones that need salvation?

Or maybe the Presbyterians, Methodists, but just think about our community. You know, all of the people that live within the reach of Saint Mark's Church. The big reveal is, is that God has a plan for all of them. Every single person that lives within the striking distance of the gospel of this church, are to be included in the vision for which God has for this community.

What about the city of Jacksonville? The entire city is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ now. And Paul, Paul gives us a way of looking at this, that it's a little unusual in our secular age and and the way that we think about things in our day and age. We live in a very materialistic age where we, we see things, very scientific.

We don't we don't think about things in a spiritual way. We don't talk in those ways. Christmas time. We sort of bring back, spiritual matters in the culture. But for the most part, we live in a very secular culture, which means a culture that God is irrelevant. It's just not even talked about. It's not discussed. It's not it's not part of our thinking.

And what listen to the way Paul puts it when it comes to the administration of this mystery with respect to the church, is very interesting passage. He says, that to me, though, I'm the very least of all the saints, grace was given to preach to the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone.

What is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things? So that. And here's the part I really want you to listen to, so that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. That's not what you would expect.

You would expect that that the message of the gospel would be manifest through the church to the people of this world. That's not the way Paul puts it. What he says is that the gospel and the administration of the mystery of the message of Jesus Christ is being made known to the spiritual authorities and powers in the heavenly realms.

And the way that, to think about this is that prior to the coming of Jesus Christ, all of the nations, tribes, and peoples of this world were under the authority in the bondage of evil. Every, every single nation, the only nation and people group that was not under that authority was Israel. And more often than not, they themselves were submitting to the authority of the evil one and to worship of false gods and false idols.

After the coming of Jesus Christ, there's a new sheriff in town in the spiritual realms, and with his death, resurrection, and ascension, those evil authorities and powers no longer have sway and authority and power over the people of this world. Which is why that from that point on, the gospel can go out under the Apostle Paul or any missionary, any preacher, any any minister of the gospel can go to any place in the entire planet and proclaim the name of Jesus Christ and say, Jesus Christ is the Lord and Savior of the world, and people will give their lives to him.

They will. They will bend the knee and they will. They will accept him as their Lord and Savior and believe in the gospel and find salvation. You can do this anywhere on this planet now. Why? Because the spiritual powers and authorities in the heavenly realms have been put on notice by the church. And so one of the very practical things about this and this is what I want to leave you with, is something very practical to think about as you think about your life, you think about your family, you think about your community, your job, your company, your business, whatever it is, anything and all of your life.

You could think about your country. You could think about foreign countries, Venezuela or Cuba or, Israel or whatever it is.

Any, any place on this, on this earth that doesn't bend the knee to Jesus Christ, that doesn't have him as the authority, any dynamic, any person, any community that doesn't lift up Jesus as Lord and Savior is fair game for the gospel. It's fair game because the powers and the authorities

that are holding sway over whatever those dynamics that family, that person, whatever it is, they are not owned by the power that is controlling them.

Now, they may be submitting to it. They may be under its bondage, they may be under its authority. But Jesus Christ is has now been revealed to be the Lord and Savior of the entire cosmos in the world. And our job as the church, and this is very practical, actually, is to go into any of these places, any of these dynamics, interact with any of these people and take the message of Jesus into those dark places.

And the reason why we have confidence to do that is because of the big reveal, because, the power and the authority that has been given to the church to drive away darkness is, is really unbelievable and unfathomable. You say, well, I'd be too scared to go to that dynamic or to that person or to that community and, and just think about the history of the church and how everyday people have been proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ and praying into these dark places and seeing the liberation of those who have been held in bondage by some of the most powerful evil forces that have ever been known.

And that's a different way of thinking about things. It's a spiritual way of thinking about things. And so, this is this is why Paul, at the end of this letter to the Ephesians, he says, you really need to understand that your battle is not against flesh and blood, but it's really against Satan and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

And he encourages us as people to put on the full armor of God. And and we do that not only through our prayers, but by putting on Christ and His righteousness and all the different armor that's listed in Ephesians chapter six, like the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation, and of course, the offensive weapon is the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God.

So, the the call of the season of epiphany is to let the light of Jesus Christ manifest within your life personally. And so I want to encourage you again to think about the places that are the dark places in your life, wherever they are, could be in your life personally, could be in your family. It could be in your community.

Wherever it is. Pray into it. Pray into it. With the gospel of Jesus Christ in mind and watch the light of God drive away and dispel the darkness by his power and the power of the administration of the mystery that is now been made known.