

The Best Resolution You Can Make

Ephesians 3:1-21

The sixth of January is Epiphany. You probably will not take notice of Epiphany next Tuesday, because you will have moved on from Christmas, if you have not done so already. Most of us have taken down our Christmas trees and decorations. We have used, eaten, or put away our gifts. Persons with jobs will be working Tuesday, and children will be back in school. Unless you note the term Epiphany on your calendar, you will not even be aware of the day, and unless you read a certain kind of devotional literature, you will not stop to consider that for much of Christendom Epiphany is a day of great importance.

The term “epiphany” means “a sudden manifestation of the essence or meaning of something.” Epiphany for the church is a feast which celebrates the manifestation of the love and purpose of God in Jesus Christ. The gospel story associated with Epiphany is the visit of the Magi, and sometimes it is said that the feast commemorates the revelation of God’s love and grace to the Gentiles. I prefer to think that Epiphany is the burst of light and beauty in the Christ that shows that God’s love covers all persons and all situations. In a sense Epiphany gives meaning to all that we have done over the past few weeks getting ready for and celebrating Christmas.

I hope that we do not leave Christmas or enter the new year without gaining a fresh sense of God’s love in our lives. Epiphany does not have to be a date on the calendar or a religious holiday that we struggle to understand. But our lives constantly need what epiphany can bring. We need light and revelation and recognition. That’s what brings power and renewal to our lives.

In the letter to the Ephesians, prior to issuing an ethical charge to the churches reading the letter, Paul wrote about “the administration of God’s grace” given to him (v.3) and about the “mystery made known by revelation” (v. 4). He was recalling his own great epiphany on the Damascus Road. On the road, according to the writer of the Book of the Acts and according to Paul’s own descriptions, Jesus appeared to Paul and

spoke to him. We can never know exactly what transpired that day, but we know that Paul was forever changed.

The recognition of some insight into reality or beauty does that for all of us. An epiphany does not have to be something exotic. The Trappist monk Thomas Merton told in very simple terms how he came to see the wonder of being human: “In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs. . . . It was like waking from a dream of separateness . . . to take your place as a member of the human race. I had the immense joy of being man, a member of the race in which God himself became incarnate. If only everybody could realize this. But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people they are all walking round shining like the sun.”

You have had such experiences yourself. Think of the time you held a child and knew you were embracing a miracle. Think of the time when you did something well or meaningful to someone else and realized that you were using gifts God had made to you. Think of the time when in church or in some setting of natural beauty you felt the unmistakable presence of God. Such times give shape to life. They define who we are.

I don't know that you can plan to have an epiphany. The Magi did not plan for the revelation they received; they were simply following some celestial phenomenon that had attracted their attention. You can't plan, but you can search. You can look for manifestations of God's love and truth.

In a sense that is what we do when we make New Year's resolutions. We are looking and hoping for ways to enrich our lives. I'm always a little taken aback when someone says that he or she doesn't believe in the value of resolutions. Is that person becoming cynical about life's possibilities? Oh, I know that we don't do very well with our resolutions. I have already failed in some that I made. And I realize that we usually don't remember them for very long.

Several years ago I took part in a Sunday School class party on New Year's Eve. Everyone was talking about resolutions. On a spur-of-the-moment idea I asked the participants to list their resolutions on a sheet of paper, seal the paper in an envelope,

and place their names on the outside. I collected the envelopes. Six months later, at the end of June, without ever looking to see what anyone had written, I added addresses to the names and dropped the envelopes into the mail. The next Sunday the class had an interesting discussion. Hardly anyone even remembered what his resolutions were.

Almost all of us are guilty of that. But making resolutions shows that we mean well and that we hope for changes in our lives. I don't know what kind of resolutions you have made or will make this year. If you are like most people, you will resolve to lose weight, manage your money better, make more friends, simplify your life, or something that will make you feel better about yourself. Once I decided to try to make my resolutions specific. For example, I resolved to read certain books or to visit certain places.

However you choose to do it or whether you choose not to make resolutions, let me suggest something for you. God has an epiphany for each of us. During the new year, seek to experience it to the fullest. Paul wrote, in his prayer for the Ephesian Christians, "I pray that you . . . may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (vv. 17-19).

In short, here's what I'm suggesting as the best resolution you can make: Seek the epiphany of God's love in Christ. I never read Paul's concept of the height and depth and length and width of God's love without thinking that he was trying to describe the inexhaustible and the limitless. The love of God in Christ gives us acceptance and forgiveness. It gives us freedom and security. It gives us present power and future hope. It allows us to see the sacredness of all of life and to experience the wonder of creation and of life itself. When you sense that kind of love, you have had a life-changing epiphany.

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