



THIRD SUNDAY OF EPIPHANY JANUARY 19TH, 2020

The Theophany of God: The Kingdom of Jubilee



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A photo of some of the survivors of Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571, that crashed in the Andes, October 13th, 1972.

Theophany is the word used in Christian discourse to refer to the presence of God, the “outbreak” of God in human reality. What marks, characterizes theophanies in the Bible is the experience of liberation, of freedom. At Christmas, we heard about the theophany of God among us and for us, in the experience of the birth of Jesus. Last week, we continued with this idea of theophany with our focus upon John’s Gospel with Jesus described as the “Lamb of God”, which in John is all about the victory of peace in the world. We built upon that, as we focused upon Martin Luther King, as one who re-presented the theophany of God in modern times, through the struggle for racial equality and peace in America. We learnt that one of King’s real insights was this: to live peaceably means to be “creatively maladjusted” to the norms to which we naturally conform. In a sense, King’s insight reflects the spirit of Jesus’ own way of living. It is no coincidence that both were assassinated for what they proclaimed.

Today, we move to the Gospel of Luke and explore another concept of theophany – the Biblical Kingdom idea of *Jubilee*, which is important in Luke’s presentation of Jesus. Whereas last week we learnt that an expression of theophany, of the outbreak of God among us, is living peaceably, today we broaden our thinking to specifics: living in a spirit that approximates Jubilee.

GATHERING

Lighting the Candle

In the name of the Father
 In the name of the Son
 In the name of the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with
And also with you

In the Gospel, God has given us a Light for all nations:
 unmasking the dark
 so peace with justice may penetrate every corner of the earth.

This is the mission of the Christian church!

Hymn: The Virgin Mary had a Baby Boy (TiS 307, The Virgin Mary, Anon, Caribbean)

Glimpsing the Kingdom: A Way of Seeing the World and Acting

The Hebrews always saw social and political reality framed within a body of law - divine law. This was not because they were legalists, but because they were well aware of the way injustice arises. The insight of the Hebrews is that the “rule of law”, to use a modern term that grounds democracies, is better than no law, but more importantly, such law must be defensive: speak for the slave, for the weak, for the victim. In short divine law speaks from “below”, from the perspective of those who suffer. In this opening prayer, we set the framework for the service, alluding to the Hebrew reading from Nehemiah.

The law of God is the hand held out
to embrace the one who is grieving.

The law of God is the cup held out
to give drink to the one who is thirsty.

The law of God is the ear that is turned
to the voice of the one who is hurting.

The law of God is the feet that move
to walk a while with the lonely.

The law of God is the candle lit
in the dark for the one despairing.

The law of God is the burden shared
with the one who stumbles, weary.

The law of God is the laugh of the child,
the light in the eyes of the dancing.

The law of God is the smile on the face
of the feasting, who once was hungry.

And should we weep to hear this law
in the midst of our world of harshness,

***should it burn our hearts and wound our souls
to think of all our selfishness,***

let that salty sting become sweetness poured:
love's honey, healing, saving us.

So that the kingdom of God may be among us!

The Peace

Introduction to the Theme of Jubilee

LET'S HEAR THE WORD

Some Insights about the Kingdom of God

Obsessed by a fairy tale, we spend our lives searching for a magic door and a lost kingdom of peace. **Eugene O'Neill**

Our faith is stronger than death, our philosophy is firmer than flesh, and the spread of the Kingdom of God upon the earth is more sublime and more compelling. **Dorothy Day**

The Jubilee year included four prescriptions in Hebrew law: leaving the soil fallow so that it might recuperate; freeing people from their financial debts; liberating people who had fallen into the institution of slavery; and the return to each individual, his family's property, which they may have lost. **John Howard Yoder**

To announce that the Liberator is sitting among the poor and that the wounds are signs of hope and that today is the day of liberation, is a step very few can take. But this is exactly the announcement of Jesus, the wounded healer: "The master is coming - not tomorrow, but today, not next year, but this year, not after all our misery is passed, but in the middle of it, not in another place but right here where we are standing."

Henri J. M. Nouwen

Nehemiah 8:1-10 (Good News Translation)

Joan Watson

Nehemiah 8:1-10 gives the background for the whole of chapters 8-10. These three chapters have always puzzled interpreters. The book of Nehemiah mainly concerns the work of the man Nehemiah, the Persian appointed governor of Judea who was responsible for rebuilding Jerusalem some 70-80 years after the return from exile. Chapters 8-10, however, focus on the priest Ezra and the Levites, the establishment of the 'law of Moses' (or 'law of God') as central in the lives of the people after the return, and the renewal of the covenant. What is interesting here is that the law here appears to be a little different to that of the law expressed in the so called "law of Moses" (the books of Genesis to Deuteronomy). What this suggests is that the law developed and changed over time, possibly from community to community. In short, God's word in scripture is not understood as fixed, immutable or unchanging. Indeed, this is why the priestly caste, the Levites, existed – to engage in its interpretation in and for changing situations. That said, the point of today's reading is the hearing of the law as the people have returned to Jerusalem and begun to rebuild. They are moved by the appearance of God through the law'. It is almost a theophany – an appearance of God to them.

8 By the seventh month the people of Israel were all settled in their towns. On the first day of that month they all assembled in Jerusalem, in the square just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra, the priest and scholar of the Law which the LORD had given Israel through Moses, to get the book of the Law. ² So Ezra brought it to the place where the people had gathered—men, women, and the children who were old enough to understand. ³ There in the square by the gate he read the Law to them from dawn until noon, and they all listened attentively.

⁵ As Ezra stood there on the platform high above the people, they all kept their eyes fixed on him. As soon as he opened the book, they all stood up. ⁶ Ezra said, "Praise the LORD, the great God!"

All the people raised their arms in the air and answered, "Amen! Amen!" They knelt in worship, with their faces to the ground.

⁸ They gave an oral translation^[a] of God's Law and explained^[b] it so that the people could understand it.

⁹ When the people heard what the Law required, they were so moved that they began to cry. So Nehemiah, who was the governor, Ezra, the priest and scholar of the Law, and the Levites who were explaining the Law told all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God, so you are not to mourn or cry. ¹⁰ Now go home and have a feast. Share your food and wine with those who don't have enough. Today is holy to our Lord, so don't be sad. The joy that the LORD gives you will make you strong."

The word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Luke 4:14-21 (Good News Translation)

Hazel Ruskin

In the Hebrew passage from Nehemiah, the point is that God appears to his people through the law, in a new situation: it is a *theophany*. The central point of *this* Gospel reading is the same. History has moved on, things are never the same as they were, but God appears establishing God's presence and explaining what that presence concretely means. Here, Jesus - God incarnate - proclaims a manifesto, articulates his platform. It is as one may expect, grounded in the Exodus and prophetic tradition and it concerns freedom. In sum, it harks both backward and forward: backward to the Jewish idea of the Jubilee, and forward to its realization in history. Like most theophanies, like most situations where God appears, there is an upsetting of the order of things. The anticipation of conflict are provocative final words of Jesus, ""*This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.*" A clue to the resistance facing God in Jesus' 'reform package' focused upon liberation, is the silence of the synagogue community, their eyes fixed upon him (*atenisovtes*). It is unclear as to whether this "gaze" is immediately benign or malevolent. What we can say is that within days, the very same people were out to murder him, to silence the Word.

¹⁴ Then Jesus returned to Galilee, and the power of the Holy Spirit was with him. The news about him spread throughout all that territory. ¹⁵ He taught in the synagogues and was praised by everyone.

¹⁶ Then Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath he went as usual to the synagogue. He stood up to read the Scriptures ¹⁷ and was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it is written,

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free the oppressed

¹⁹ and announce that the time has come
when the Lord will save his people.”

²⁰ Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him, ²¹ as he said to them, “This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Praise to you Lord Christ

Hymn: Fairest Lord Jesus (TiS 203, St Elizabeth, Anon, Münster)

A Clip: “Alive”... A Theophany of God

The film, “Alive” is about the rescue of a group of Uruguayan amateur rugby players, from Stella Maris College, Montevideo, whose chartered flight from the Uruguayan Air Force, 571 went down in the Andes on the journey from Montevideo to Santiago, on October 13th, 1972. Some of the travellers died upon impact, others died from wounds suffered; but the remainder survived. Forced to consume the dead bodies of their friends, the group decide that no-one will rescue them, and that they will have to find their own way out. The most fit, Nando Parrado and Roberto Canessa, after twelve days of walking west to Chile, raise the alarm. The final scene is extraordinary, making the hairs stand-up on the back of your neck, as these people experience rescue, liberation, freedom, 72 days after the crash. They are born again. A companion documentary, “*Alive: 20 Years Later*”, was released at the same time as the film. It includes interviews with the survivors, as well as documentary footage of the rescue. The 30th Anniversary Edition of *Alive: The Miracle of the Andes* (on DVD) includes this documentary in the *Extras* section.

Some thoughts...

Let’s Give our Offerings,

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.***

Prayer of Dedication

Amen

Prayers of the People

Robyn Egarr

The one who prays variously offers the words after each group of petitions, “rescue your world”, and the people respond, “may we be your hands and feet”.

Hymn: I the Lord of Sea and Sky (TiS 658, Here I am Lord, Daniel L. Schutte)

Blessing

Our faith is stronger than death,
our philosophy is firmer than flesh.

Now go into the world in peace;
be of good courage;
hold fast to that which is good;
render to no one evil for evil;
strengthen the fainthearted;
support the weak;
help the afflicted;
honour everyone.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ

Amen

Closing Blessing: May the feet of God walk with you (TiS 779, Aubrey, Aubrey Podlich)

Musical Postlude

Organist

John Hughes



The last photo taken before the crash of Fuerza Aérea Uruguaya, Flight 571 on the journey from Montevideo, Uruguay to Santiago de Chile, October 13th, 1972