



Recognizing God's Story The Unexpected Discovery Epiphany Papers: (1 of 5)

The word Epiphany means “manifestation” or “revelation.” We begin Epiphanytide by remembering the wise ones that traveled a great distance just on the promise of a star. When they set out on their journey did they leave their expectations behind? Were they waiting for God to reveal to them a leader who would change the course of the world? Whatever they might have expected, they brought their finest gifts, and in return were invited into the presence of God incarnate, humanity and divinity brought together in a little child.

As we enter this season of Epiphany, the Diocese of Massachusetts is starting to live into a new mission strategy – as we seek to follow where God is leading us as a diocese, as congregational communities and as individuals. Please use these studies about seeing and understanding God's unexpected work in the world to

reflect on your own understanding of God's calling to your church and to you. What is God revealing? And what is your best gift that you lay at the feet of Jesus?

For this season of Epiphany and in preparation for the Spring Learning Event on March 4th, we invite you to focus on these stories of “epiphanies” of Jesus today – in our world, in our communities, in our churches and in our lives.

Amy Cook

Matthew 25:37-40 NRSV

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

The Unexpected Discovery

This story comes from Katie McCracken, 26 years old third grade teacher in the Needham public school system, and a member at Christ Church, Needham. Her mother, Jennifer McCracken is a postulant for ordination to the priesthood in our diocese, and has made several trips to Haiti through mission work with the church. The following reflection comes from Katie after she accompanied her mother on one of these trips.

Katie's story

My mother asked me in April if I would be interested in going to Haiti. Though my reaction to this invitation was not surprising to her, it was not what she was hoping for. Would I like to go to Haiti? Well, to be honest I do not really care for traveling. I like to hear about others grand adventures but rarely seek out any for myself. I suppose I had grown comfortable in this sort of distant relationship with Haiti. I had heard so much from my mom about her past trips. I applauded her efforts and dedication to the cause but made no attempt to take it

on as my own, and when the invitation was extended I was reluctant to accept. However, I knew that it would mean the world to my mother, so I agreed. Also, with that being said, thank you mom for asking, but it was never really a choice. I was supposed to want to go. I was supposed to recognize that this wasn't about me, and that I should be motivated simply because I would be doing meaningful work. But something was holding me back.

It is hard to give up the comforts of home but I know now that was not the thing that was keeping me from pouring my heart into this experience. It was fear. I did not feel unsafe going to Haiti, what I was afraid of was responsibility. As I have come to understand what this means, I hope I can explain it to you. Let me begin by saying that everyone who has gone to Haiti says it transformed them; that the experience opened their eyes to the injustices of the world and the needs of the people of Haiti.

I think that perhaps I felt accused of not knowing this already. Of course I know that there are millions of people who fall victim to hunger, homelessness, illness, or natural disasters. I care for them and their suffering and I want to help them. I believed in all of this... Or do I? Do I truly care for them and seek to help them? I know now that I did not, because if I really believed in them, if I really believed that they needed help, then I would also believe that it is my responsibility to help them, and thus I would act on this belief. It would become my responsibility to go and meet the people of Haiti, to carry the weight of their needs. It would then become my responsibility to return home and share my experiences with others, to get them to go as well. My responsibilities would not end there. I would need to keep going to Haiti, to continue acting on my beliefs, and to reach out to people all over the world who have similar needs. I think that this all seemed too great a challenge. What could I really do?

But off I went to Haiti, still resisting that I would have any experience that would truly transform me. We met some very interesting and welcoming people. Everyone was kind and grateful that we were there. The countryside was breathtaking, the food was straight from the ground, and we were doing good work. We spent some time visiting schools and churches, bringing supplies and medicine, and sharing time with the community in prayer and in song. We built benches, painted swing sets, repaired desks and beams in a church. It was a great trip. I could not deny it, but I did not yet feel transformed. I wondered if I was letting myself take it all in. I wondered what I was missing, and why it wasn't fully hitting me, like I had heard it was supposed to. We visited an orphanage run by an American couple and volunteers from both Haiti and America. The children generally seemed happy, healthy and well taken care of. I was filled with hope because the children here really were loved. Overall I had found that despite the great needs of the country, the people were remarkably spiritual, compassionate, joyful, and hopeful. My mother was right. It is a beautiful culture. Still, I did not feel transformed. Perhaps it would take some time for the experience to sink in.

On our last day we traveled to the Missionaries of Charity which is an orphanage in the city of Port Au Prince. Here there are four main rooms that are filled with rows and rows of cribs. Each crib was home to a very sick child between the ages of a few months to five or six years. I had been warned that what I saw here might be unbearable, because even though they were taken care of and getting help, these babies were not well. Upon entering the first room, I was stunned. I found that I did not know what to do. I was afraid to hold them because I didn't want to hurt them. I did not know how to comfort them. I was told that it was alright to pick them up. That they just wanted to be held. So hold them I did.

I held many of them, fed some of them, took them outside, and talked to them. I tried to make them smile and some of them did. I was amazed that I was able to comfort them. With all that troubled them, they were just babies. All they needed was for someone to love them, to pay attention to them and play with them, and even if just for ten minutes, we were able to give all of that to most of the babies in the two rooms we visited. In the few hours that we were there I let go of my fear and found again that they were just babies, and it is so easy to love them. It is so easy, and so necessary. I enjoyed my time, though it was heartbreaking to leave and see them in such a state of suffering. I was surprised though that I did not really feel much deep emotion about

that particular experience. Normally I feel things very strongly and immediately, and I felt as though there must be something wrong with me if even that does not transform me.

The night we returned home, I began to peel away the layers. I was truly happy that we were able to meet some of the needs of the people we met. I found that I did love the country and its people in a deeper way, but something was missing. I lay awake in bed wondering what it was that I was feeling deep in my gut. Was it the French fries from lunch at the airport? Well that probably didn't help, but what was this strange and unfamiliar feeling. I began to cry without really knowing what triggered it.

Finally I realized. I had just become the mother of about fifty emaciated, sick little babies who I loved so deeply and for whom I could realistically do very little. They were just the start too. There are millions like them all over the world. I could not have known of them or their needs until I held them in my arms and looked into their eyes. The feeling overwhelmed me. I discussed this with my own mother, realizing that she already knew these consuming emotions. It had finally hit me. I was not gaining some new and great responsibility by expanding my world view. The responsibility was mine all along as a Christian, and as a human being. Not only that, but it was a challenge that I was already equipped to face. With faith and love I was able to comfort a child, reach out to new people, and give hope to a community.

I felt that I had made a discovery that now seemed so obvious and I felt that too few people really understood it. Now it is my turn to act. No matter how many benches we build, school supplies we bring, or sick babies we care for, we do not truly serve these people until we come home to spread the word to all of you. We cannot truly love them until we help others learn to love them too. The world is a big place and the needs are great, but if we open our hearts to our responsibilities as members of a larger community, we will find that we are already blessed with the means to make a difference. It is that easy. And believe me, no matter how hard you try to keep from accepting this responsibility, it will find its way into your life, because it was there from the start.

Katie McCracken

Discussion Questions: (for individuals or small group discussion)

1. Where do you see an epiphany for Katie in this story?
2. What was Katie afraid of at the beginning of her story? Have you had those same fears?
3. Have you ever experienced a "transformative" time of mission or service? Was it what you expected?
4. What is your own understanding of your place in serving the world? When have you felt it was "your time to act?"
5. Looking at the scripture from Matthew 25, how have you seen Jesus in someone you have helped?
6. What might be an epiphany for you in reading this story?