



## Recognizing God's Story The Unexpected Listener Epiphany Papers: (5 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.

Please note that scripture comes from “The Message” which is a modern language paraphrase of the Bible. I encourage you to use it as a new way to hear ancient texts.

Amy Cook

### **Matthew 15:29-31 The Message (MSG)**

*After Jesus returned, he walked along Lake Galilee and then climbed a mountain and took his place, ready to receive visitors. They came, tons of them, bringing along the paraplegic, the blind, the maimed, the mute—all sorts of people in need—and more or less threw them down at Jesus' feet to see what he would do with them. He healed them. When the people saw the mutes speaking, the maimed healthy, the paraplegics walking around, the blind looking around, they were astonished and let everyone know that God was blazingly alive among them.*

### **The Unexpected Listener**

I am very excited about the ministry of Living Compass, a Christian wellness program. I attended training for the program in April, 2016 in the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago and was immediately excited by the possibilities of the program and the materials to help folks connect faith to every facet of their daily life. They describe their program this way “Living Compass provides tools and trainings to assist individuals, families, and congregations as they seek to live the abundant life God intends for them in all areas of life – heart, soul, strength, and mind” ([www.livingcompass.org](http://www.livingcompass.org)).

I came back to the diocese ready to share this wellness framework with all of our churches and set up some information times and workshops. The Rev. Jon Strand at St. Paul's, Natick invited me to come and share with

the Monday evening contemplative prayer group because they are very interested in wellness ministries and see this as an important part of the ministry of St. Paul's.

Before the evening prayer time there were 8 of us having dinner together at a local café. I brought the Living Compass materials to show them and explained the various parts as we waited for our dinner. Suddenly a woman at a nearby table got up and interrupted us. "I'm sorry to interrupt" she said, "but what is this that you are talking about?" I shared a little bit more about the program and she thanked us and went back to her table. I continued talking and sharing about Living Compass. A few minutes later she got up and came over to the table again. "I'm sorry to interrupt again, but did you say there was a website?" I shared some more information and she excused herself and sat down again.

I continued to talk about the program and how St. Paul's could offer these classes for the community and the different kinds of program materials. After a few minutes the same woman returned and asked "Can anyone come to this program?" Those gathered around the table then told her about St. Paul's and invited her to come, shared their contemplative prayer group, and welcomed her at any time.

I am convinced that people want to know about wellness and living a life of abundance. They want to hear stories of those who have been healed. They want to know that there is a better way than the brokenness that many are living with. In the scripture passage from Matthew we hear about folks flocking to Jesus for healing. When they are made whole in some way they can't stop talking about it. This is Good News.

The next story is from a priest who used to be in Connecticut, and then moved to Denver to work at St. John's Episcopal Cathedral. This was written as he was just about to move to a new position as rector at St. Phillip's in the Hills in Tucson, Arizona. He is the author of a book on young adult ministry titled "Yearning: Authentic Transformation, Young Adults, and the Church." In this story he shares a moment of hearing an unexpected story flowing from a person excited by Jesus.

## Midnight Evangelism

*So this will be a short post as we are in the throes of packing and the movers come later this morning – but I had one of those experiences that puts a few things in perspective. At 11:30 in the evening I ran to Walgreen's to get some last minute essentials for our trip to Tucson. I have spent the day packing, cleaning out the garage, cleaning off lawn furniture, throwing away lots of trash, and more. So after 15 hours of that, I was not looking my Sunday best.*

*When I went in to the store, a young woman was at the counter. She was in soccer shorts and a t-shirt and seemed to be having a pretty animated though convivial conversation with the man working the counter. I got my few items and went to stand in line while wondering why her transaction was taking so long. I overheard her say, "It's a great church!" It turns out she had been telling him all about her church – that's what was taking so long. When she noticed that I was listening in – she asked me "Do you want to know more?"*

*I was taken in by her energy and said that I would. She explained that she goes to the Upper Room Church which was started in Dallas but has branched out to Denver. She loves it because it is focused on "The work Jesus did." When I asked what that meant, she said, "Well, for example, we've all been out tonight going to places where the homeless gather at night and inviting them to breakfast tomorrow morning. No strings, just a meal and a conversation partner."*

*So, at nearly midnight, she was out inviting those in need of a hot meal and companionship to come to her church. More than that, she was talking to two unlikely candidates, the night-shift guy at Walgreen's and a sweaty random customer in a tank-top and basketball shorts (that would be me), about how great her church is. She said, "It's small and authentic and I love it." She asked me if I was interested in visiting and I came clean. She said, "That's awesome! I hope Jesus blesses your ministry!"*

*I told her that he already had and that it had been through her energy tonight.*

*Sometimes evangelism seems like a scary proposition – but here was a woman in her mid-twenties gushing about doing the work of Jesus and sharing it with strangers and those in need. In the midst of packing and a bit of domestic chaos, I was in some need too. The funny thing was that the Walgreen’s employee and I were not annoyed at all – we were not put out by her enthusiasm – indeed both of us were genuinely touched. Part of what made her so compelling is that she was not just sharing Good News but living it.*

*I wonder just how the Episcopal Church could be changed and change lives if we were so willing to go out and tell whomever we meet, however they’re dressed, wherever they are that we have a Church that we love that is small but authentic and is about the work Jesus did – and still does in so many ways.*

This post first appeared July 19, 2016 on “A Desert Father” (<https://adesertfather.org>) Robert Hendrickson’s blog. It is reposted with permission.

**Discussion Questions: (for individuals or small group discussion)**

1. Where do you see an epiphany for Robert in his story?
2. Have you ever been caught up in hearing someone tell their own experience of healing or of a life change that has brought them to a new place? What was that like?
3. Where is Jesus at work in your community?
4. Have you ever had an experience that was so exciting and joyful for you that you had to share it with everyone you met?
5. What do you believe about how Jesus can bring healing and wholeness?
6. As Rev. Hendrickson wrote above: *I wonder just how the Episcopal Church could be changed and change lives if we were so willing to go out and tell whomever we meet, however they’re dressed, wherever they are that we have a Church that we love that is small but authentic and is about the work Jesus did?* - Can you tell your story? Can you share your faith story with joy and enthusiasm?
7. What might be an epiphany for you in reading these stories?