



Face to Face

By The Rev. Jarrett Kerbel (1/09/26)

Epiphany is the church season that declares God's delight in all that God has created, especially humans. The Baptism of Our Lord will be celebrated this coming Sunday wherein we overhear God the Father's benediction over Jesus, "This is my son with whom I am well pleased!" Delight, affirmation, the flooding of divine light and life into our humanity.

The Collect for the Epiphany reflects God's delight and the surprising promise that delight entails;

O God, by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth: Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The gift of God's presence is not just a general vibe. What is surprising about God's gift of presence is that God meets us 'face to face' in Jesus. From the perspective of Israelite religion, a face to face encounter with God is a blessing beyond belief. In the Hebrew Bible, meeting God face to face carries a fear of overwhelming power and majesty that could be deadly. When Moses asks to see God face to face in the Book of Exodus, God lovingly hides Moses in a cleft of rock before showing Moses the Divine "backside." In short, "Moon over Moses."

What does the promise of a face to face encounter with God in the face of Jesus mean for us? First, we learn that God is so devoted to the redemption of humanity that God is willing to meet us where we are, and in the best way for us to receive God's message of love. Have you ever noticed how a baby stares intently into the face of a mother or father? The gaze of loving recognition from another is crucial to our formation of a stable, unified selfhood. God knows this and uses it to restore us our souls through intimate, loving human contact.

Secondly, we learn what the Image of God in humanity looks like. It looks like Jesus. Loving, warm, caring, gracious, truthful, trustworthy, strong, calm, emotionally available, with eyes that smile and weep with deepest compassion ever offered from a person to a person. In his face, Jesus gives us a vision of our humanity redeemed and restored as God's image bearers.

Finally, we learn how important it is to offer face to face recognition and respect to each other in our Church community and to every person who enters our doors. It may seem trivial, but this is why we wear nametags. We want to address each other by name, just as our Good Shepherd does. This is why when I meet a person who is homeless on the street I look them in the eye with respect, share my name, shake hands and give them my full attention.

Each of us is called to grow in our ability to offer face to face recognition, respect and relational availability. For our church to grow into the vital body God delights in, we will need to pray for and cultivate relational availability between individuals and in groups.