

The Gift of Revelation
The Last Sunday after Epiphany
Sunday, February 14, 2021
The Rev. Paul McLain

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Wes Avram, a Presbyterian pastor, tells this story about a Valentine's Day. He and his wife Lynne could not get a babysitter. Wes went into the kitchen to settle on dinner plans and there he saw Lynne chatting with an old friend with a cardboard box in front of her. She said, 'I was out picking up some dinner when I saw this and thought of you two. Happy Valentine's Day! And be careful.' They opened the box and discovered a wiggling lobster. They had just moved from Maine and so missed lobsters. That Valentine's dinner turned out to be their best ever.

Later that evening, he received an email from a former colleague in Maine. Her son was here in Tennessee and about to have his tenth birthday. She wanted her friends to send him postcards with scenes from all different parts of the country. Wes's first thought was that this was a nice idea, but did he have time for this?

Then he recalled the surprise gift of the lobster and realized that he *should* have time for this. The first friend gave Wes a greater gift than the lobster. She gave him a reminder that he too had the time to give in ways that seek nothing in return. She revealed to Wes a whole new way of seeing gifts.

One way to see the Transfiguration in the Gospel of Mark is as a gift from Jesus to Peter, James, and John. Jesus selected the three of them, his inner circle, to go with him up the mountain. He let them in to see what no one else got to see. They got to see him become dazzling white. They got to see him talk with Moses and Elijah. Peter's response to this gift was not all bad. He was moved to give a gift as well – to build three tabernacles for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. The problem was that his gift was his way of permanently holding on to the experience. As we learned from Wes's story with the lobster and the birthday card, the best gifts are to be placed in circulation by paying them forward. So, instead of tabernacles, Peter and his companions got a cloud.

This cloud is not a bad thing. The cloud teaches Peter, James, John, and us that we can't find our way forward by ourselves. We depend on the voice of God leading us and the hand of Jesus guiding us. And we often hear that voice and receive that guidance through the gifts of others.

I remember a time when I was in a mental fog dealing with both grief and business pressures after my father's death. I felt overwhelmed by it all. One day a man named Jim, one of our employees, walked up to me and handed me a little piece of paper. On it was a quote from Theodore Roosevelt that he thought I might find helpful. The quote was, 'it is not the critic that

counts, but the person in the arena, whose face is marred by dust, sweat, and blood, who in spite of errors, continues to strive valiantly.'

Reading that quote gave me an amazing lift. I thought, "Well, I may be in some pain and I may be making some mistakes, but at least I'm in the arena. At least, I'm mixing it up with the dust and mud. At least, I have hope." I took that piece of paper and put it in my wallet. When things got tough, I would look at it again and feel re-energized for whatever challenge was out there.

When I look back on that story, what I now remember more than the quote itself is Jim. Jim was a retired Marine sergeant who always had a smile. He was a man who lived out his deep faith each day. He had the gift of bringing encouragement to everyone around him. Jim noticed that I was feeling overwhelmed. He cared enough about me to take the time to find that particular quote. that he thought would be helpful to my situation. Then he took a risk by handing it to me, his boss. That day, Jim reached out with one hand to me, shined a flashlight with his other hand, and guided me through the fog. The best way I can repay him is to pay it forward.

Sometimes God reveals the light more directly. A parishioner who, like so many of us, has experienced recent deaths in her inner circle, gave me permission to share her story. One afternoon, the grief from those recent deaths felt overwhelming to her, almost to the point of feeling paralyzed by it. She prayed earnestly to God for a sign, any kind of sign, that might give her a little hope and peace. She looked up from her prayer and looked out the window. There was the most beautiful sunset she had seen in years. The deep hues and colors were like that of a Monet painting. And it seemed to her that not only was Jesus speaking to her and shining a light out to her, but so was the person she loved who died most recently. He was an avid outdoorsman who took the time to appreciate the beauty of nature. He was somehow present to her through the sunset, joining Christ to cradle her with love, grant her a little peace, and begin the journey toward healing her heart.

In a few days, we enter the season of Lent. It will be a different Lent here at Calvary, and many of you along with friends throughout the world are offering old gifts and discovering new ones to help us together reveal Christ's walk with us and in us in fresh and profound ways.

It is a time to listen, to see, to sense, and to pray. It is a time to give space for the light of Christ to penetrate the fog and shine through the darkness. It is a time for us to be and share that light with each other and the world around us. It is a time for us to offer big and little gifts of revelation. *Amen.*