

**SERMON FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
JANUARY 10, 2010**

Title: "CALL WAITING!"

Acts 10:34-38

If you ever want to get in touch with me I have three email addresses, a home phone with an answering machine, two church phone numbers, a cell phone, snail mail and two Campbell soup cans with a string attached. Which is the only truly reliable system there is.

In spite of my name being on a "do not call list" for telemarketing I still get calls at dinner time for aluminum siding, police benevolent associations, two political parties and the ever loving better telephone service. It is obvious that someone is trying to get in touch with us. We might wait sometimes to hear a voice or see who sent the email and I can assure you that if any friend calls that we know from either this parish or the one I am ministering to as a supply priest during my so called retirement we dash to the phone and God help anyone who is in the way. I mean it when we say, "Your call is important to us."

Someone important has been trying to get in touch with you and me. It would be greatly important and to our advantage to return the call. That's what Epiphany is all about. "Epiphanos" is a Greek word that we use to mean, "The showing forth of God." Epiphany means that God is trying to get through to us.

It's as if God is letting us know that it is not enough just to know about God, we need to know God. You can read every book written, every detail about a person and not really know them; all that our efforts would give us is only superficial knowledge. We can read every recognized theologian's concept of God, yes, even the Bible which is God's relationship with humankind, written by truly divinely inspired authors, but it is our own personal epiphany that is the bridge that connects us with the reality that is God. God has been trying to get through to us and be known to us since the beginning of time.

First of all, Paul reminds us that God should be as evident in creation, as an artist is reflected by their painting, sculpture or music. There is an order to creation that we can replicate but not create. As an aside, my wife and I went to the Franklin Institute's exhibition of Body Worlds a few years ago and we would like to go again. It is a bit disturbing but it is inconceivable to me how someone after seeing the inner workings of the circulatory system or nervous system could think all that fell together by chance.

Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, "Ever since the creation of the world, His eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things God has made." And we are the epitome of that creation able to factor and make decisions philosophically in the image of God.

God is also trying to get through to us through the experiences of our lives and the history of the human race. But one time God did something really spectacular to get our attention. The event was itself was not really impressive in human terms. A child was born. Well, that's spectacular, I think. It happened in the Mediterranean, smack in the middle of the earth, in Bethlehem. God tried everything else to get our attention why not become one with us and maybe that would work.

God then made it known to a few people in succession, first, just a few poor shepherds. In a diocese of about 163 Episcopal churches I can only name about four churches that are really wealthy. And even those four have had to cut back in this present economy. And what do they cut back on first? The poor, the homeless, the widows and children, the outreach, missions, like St. Martin's Chapel. "Religion is this to look after widows and children." That's what James the brother of our Lord writes. And I thought that's what this thing called "Christianity" was all about. But that's just my opinion. Unfortunately, we do have to pay our bills in order to do our ministry. What isn't my opinion is that the first people God revealed Himself to were the poor shepherds abiding in the fields heralding the news that God's love is equal even if we aren't always.

Peter states: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him."

2. And then some astrologers. We think they were kings. The psalm for the Feast of the Epiphany tells us they were kings. The point is they were gentiles of all races to let us know as Peter writes, "He is Lord of all." Not just of the rich, poor, black or white, Jewish, Zoroastrians, Asian, Gentiles, all human beings. He is Lord of all. Why can't people hear that?

Wednesday night my wife and I were eating at a local bistro and a young woman across from us was on her cell phone the whole time. Two hours. She only stopped a couple of times to dial someone else and that's fine I suppose but I had the urge to go over to her and say if you are that lonely come over and sit with us. I don't think we are ever silent enough for God to penetrate our constant noise making. God I can't hear you! I hear the

rushing wind. I hear the roaring thunder. I hear the bass thumping in the car next to me. Where can I find the silence to listen to the still small voice?

Well some thirty years later after that blessed theophany that Epiphany of the birth of the Son of God, that baby in the manger Jesus has grown as it says, "in favor of God and man," and he has come to a place by the Jordan River to be baptized. It is at that baptism, not because Jesus had sin upon Him but because His ministry was to begin and another epiphany needed to take place to put the seal on those who could hear. And what did they hear, "You are my Son, my Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Those who could hear were drawn to the message of Jesus but there were those whose ears were stopped up by their own agenda, just as Herod's were and those who crucified Him, even though as Isaiah says, He did not bruise or crush a reed. He was gentle and He loved as no other had loved and they tried to put an end to Him but God is stronger than all that.

God is still trying to get in touch with everyone. Still trying get through to us and we need to jump over every obstacle and answer. How can we tune in? Well, it could actually happen in church. Imagine that! It happened to me when I was sitting silently in church one day seeking refuge from the crowds on Fifth Avenue. Just remember to see the reality of the words that are spoken. When you go through the motions of the service place yourself in relationship with Jesus the Lord, receive Him into yourself and your life. Don't be like the people who mutter words without meaning.

I wanted to preach about the Gospel this week but I kept thinking about Peter and what he said to Cornelius and his relatives and his friends just as he was about to baptize them. Peter was a Hebrew chauvinist. He thought Jesus had come just to save the Jews. God changed his mind in a dream. He had to stop and listen. The point is that he heard God and was now convinced that God came to save all; all who could hear that Jesus is Lord of all. All who could hear that God showed no partiality? "Those who feared God and did what was acceptable to God."

Someone is really trying to get through to us. Someone with an important message. Do we always happen to put God on "call waiting?" Amen!

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