

Epiphany Sunday, January 6, 2019  
Congregational -United Church of Christ  
Rev. Marjorie Erickson

“CHOSEN TO BE A BLESSING”

READING OF GOSPEL - MATTHEW 2:1-12 from THE MESSAGE

PRAYER TO BEGIN SERMON - “LET US PRAY”

“O GOD, YOU HAVE GIVEN US MANY WOMAN AND MEN DOWN THROUGH THE AGES, AND INDEED MANY LEADERS IN THE LIFE OF THIS VERY CONGREGATION, WHO HAVE BEEN LIKE A LIGHT SHINING IN THE DARKNESS! THEY HAVE GUIDED US TO DISCERN YOUR GREAT LOVE FOR EACH OF US AND HAVE GIVEN US FAITH!

WE REJOICE THAT WE HAVE COME TO KNOW JESUS, THE GREAT TEACHER AND WISDOM PERSON, WHO SHINES AS A LIGHT UNTO OUR PATH IN THE JOURNEY OF LIFE.

O GOD, WE KNOW THAT JESUS WAS SENT INTO THE WORLD OUT OF YOUR GREAT LOVE FOR US, SO THAT WE MIGHT BELIEVE . . .

AND IN BELIEVING THAT WE MIGHT SPEAK. WE PRAY THAT OUR LIVES MAY ALSO SPEAK OF OUR DEVOTION AND COMMITMENT TO YOU!

“NOW, LET THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATION OF MY HEART BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT, O LORD, MY STRENGTH AND MY REDEEMER.”

SERMON - “CHOSEN TO BE A BLESSING”

Today is a special day, one like no other day in our past or in our future, because we have the opportunity to start anew, to begin again, to be the best person that God has called us to be!

It's like we woke up this morning with freshness all around us, with clear eyes to see the pristine creation all around us - blue skies, bright, white mountain snow on the highest peaks in the Rocky Mountains and new life being born in the form of small, black, baby calves standing by their moms ready to embrace life. They have crossed the threshold of being born and now stand on shaky legs ready to begin!

The large herd of over a hundred elk stand nearby, sharing the same field, the same water, the same blue sky. It is like the lion and the lamb lying down together - the great and the small sharing the same field.

The Magi, as they are called in the scripture, rich and regal, riding camels, and the shepherds, wrapped in wool garments, perhaps carrying a new born lamb on their shoulders, both stepping over the threshold of that small stable to see a new born baby - God Incarnate, God come to earth in the most humble place - a stable.

Infant holy  
Infant lowly  
For his bed a cattle stall,  
Oxen lowing,  
Little knowing,  
Christ the babe is Lord of all.  
Swift are winging  
Angels singing Noels ringing  
Tidings bringing  
Christ the babe is Lord of all.

Let me say it again - this is a day, a year, like no other, for we each have the opportunity to start anew - to begin again to be the best person God has called us to be!

One thing I've learned over the last four months of studying "The Life of the Apostle Paul" in the Adult Faith Development class is be careful what you say "Yes" to! Paul's "Yes" to Jesus changed his whole life! When you say "Yes" to being part of the "Cloud of Witnesses" who proclaim the power of God and the power of love, you're stepping over a threshold and giving your dedication to larger goals than your own success and comfort!

Paul was used to the life of a rabbi - beautiful robes of clothing, fine linen, good food, time for worship, reading of the Torah. He was used to having ethical discussions about the law with fellow devoted intellectuals. He was not used to being beaten for talking about God or being thrown in prison and people calling him a traitor. But he took it all for the truth he found in meeting Jesus, the Messiah, the one whom he believed was the promise of the ages.

Last February at the beginning of my term as the moderator of this congregation, I read the following passage to the Church Council. I read it to you again today to say that *we* are a part of the "Jesus Movement" of this day and God has not given up on the world or on the church as an instrument of hope, love and peace. But we might be being called upon to do a little of turning the world upside down as a community of believers in the 21st century. Here is the scripture from Acts 17:6-7: "When the angry crowd could not find the Apostle Paul and his friend Silas, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities shouting, "These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also . . . They are acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying there is another King named "Jesus." Preaching a message of *love*.

We are called to be a continuing blessing in this community!

Change and opportunity are standing before us. We have made a commitment to try a new structure, to experiment with some new organizational strategies in 2019, so that we may continue the strong ministry and witness this church has always been in Buena Vista into the future. Our dream is to build Teams of continued co-operative efforts and strong respectful relationships which include new people who are growing in their faith and want a place to belong!

Paul was chosen and called to be an ambassador for Christ and a blessing to the future of Christianity by sharing God's radical message of love as revealed in the life of Jesus! This calling of God is for women and men, like you and me, to live our lives, speak our stories and sing our songs.

I close with this story: It is about a little boy who was not afraid or hesitant to sing his song at just the right time. The little boy's mother, whose name was Karen, was expecting her second child. Her three-year-old son, Michael, began a relationship with his unborn sister by singing to her every night. Night after night Michael would get closer to his expectant mother's tummy and sing his favorite song to his sister:

"You are my Sunshine, my only sunshine.  
You make me happy when skies are grey."

When the time came for Karen to give birth to the baby, there was trouble during the delivery and Michael's baby sister was in serious condition by the time she was born. She was rushed to the intensive care unit. Doctors feared the worst and began to try to prepare the parents for the baby's expected death. Meanwhile, little Michael kept asking about his new baby sister. He wanted to see her. He wanted to sing to her. The parents took Michael to the hospital. They put him in a scrub suit and took him into the ICU to see his sister. A hospital staff member who didn't know the situation became disturbed about a three-

year- old coming into the intensive care unit and instructed the parents to remove the boy from the area. But Michael's mother said, "He is not leaving until he sings to his sister."

Michael walked over to the little bassinet that held his tiny sister. He leaned over the edge and began to sing to her the familiar words of happiness and sunshine that so perfectly described the pure, sweet love he had for her and felt in his heart.

"You are my sunshine, my only sunshine . . .  
Please don't take my sunshine away."

What happened next was unbelievable! The doctors called it a miracle. Karen called it a miracle of God's love. The very next day, when they had thought they would be planning a funeral, Michael's baby sister instead got to go home with her parents and her big brother! She was well! She had responded immediately to the familiar voice of her brother. He sang her to life with his song of love.

Quite a moving story - but we need to realize there's a world of people out there with empty spirits and no hope because they haven't heard the music of God's love for them. They need someone to share their story or just the right song or Psalm to brighten their lives and give them hope and a new perspective. They may need someone to tell them what a difference God can make in their life!