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**Sunday 17 January to Sunday 24 January**

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Sunday 17 January 2021

# Nathanael’s epiphany

by Pauline Simonsen

**‘Do you believe because … I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these’ (John 1:50).**

Read John 1:43–51

‘Yeah, right.’

This ‘slacker’ saying is usually delivered in a tone dripping with scepticism and sarcasm – a sarcasm we hear in Nathanael’s response to Phillip: ‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?!’ Phillip has told his friend that he believes he has found ‘the one Moses wrote about in the law and about whom the prophets also wrote’ – the Messiah himself. He identifies this person as Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth. Nathanael is sceptical and dismissive of Phillip’s revelation, though. ‘Yeah, right!’

But Philip is not rebuffed. He simply responds with a gentle invitation for Nathanael to come and see for himself.

When Jesus greets Nathanael as ‘an Israelite in whom there is no deceit’ and adds that he ‘saw’ Nathanael before Phillip spoke with him, Nathanael is profoundly surprised. His scepticism melts in the light of Jesus’ supernatural perception, and Nathanael has his epiphany. He sees Jesus for a moment in his true identity. ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!’ Jesus sees Nathanael, and in response, Nathanael is allowed to see the Son of God.

Nathanael’s experience illustrates this season of Epiphany, which celebrates the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God. The word ‘epiphany’ also refers to a moment of sudden insight or personal revelation. This week we will see how Jesus’ epiphany causes a personal epiphany for different people in the Bible.

We may encounter many sarcastic, sceptical people in our witness to Jesus. It is not our job to convince them; our job is only to invite them. Jesus reveals himself at the right time and brings the epiphany each sceptic needs.

And in case we think we know all there is to know about Jesus, his final words in our reading today promise that we will see much more. There is always more of Jesus to see!

**Give us eyes to see you truly, Lord Jesus, and courage to share what we see, and faith to trust you for the revelation needed. Amen.**

Monday 18 January 2021

# Jacob’s epiphany

by Pauline Simonsen

**‘Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!”’ (Genesis 28:16).**

Read Genesis 28:10–17

Jacob is on the run. He has tricked his brother twice, and Esau is out to get him. Here in this lonely place, with a stone for a pillow, Jacob has an epiphany: he dreams of a stairway to heaven, linking God’s realm with the earth – with this lonely place, with this stone, with this desolation of land and spirit. With Jacob’s life.

Jacob is the trickster, the deceiver, a ratbag from birth. But in Jacob’s epiphany, God comes to this trickster and repeats the covenant promises God made with Abraham. God makes these promises to Jacob the ratbag: land, descendants, blessing. And God promises his everlasting faithfulness – to this unfaithful, unworthy, shifty man. Never has so much been so undeserved!

When Jacob wakes from this epiphany, this revelation of God’s graciousness, he is afraid. The Lord is with him in this desolate place, but he didn’t realise it! God has come down to him and deigned to grace Jacob the ratbag with his divine goodness, with his covenant promises. You’d think Jacob’s epiphany might bring an immediate, radical conversion of life for the trickster. But it doesn’t yet; that’s still some way off.

In John 1:51, Jesus reveals himself as the place of the stairway to heaven, as ‘Bethel’, the (new) House of God. Jesus brings the realm of God into our world – our COVID-weary, fearful, stressed world; our desolation of land and spirit. Your world. Mine.

Jesus re-speaks all of God’s promises to us! Especially the promise of God’s faithfulness to us unfaithful, unworthy people. Never has so much been so undeserved!

How will you respond to the epiphany of Jesus into your life?

**How is it that you come to us, Lord Jesus, undeserving and unfaithful as we are? How is it that you speak all your promises to us, loving God? Oh, wake us to your gracious presence, Lord, and stir us to respond to you in spirit and truth. Amen.**

Tuesday 19 January 2021

# Peter’s epiphany

by Pauline Simonsen

**‘He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God”’ (Luke 9:20).**

Read Luke 9:18–22

Who do you want Jesus to be for you?

We human beings are notorious for trying to make God in our image – a reflection more of our culture and values and needs than of God’s being. Jesus, my friend and buddy; Jesus, the wise hippy dude; Jesus, the high church priest; Jesus, the liberation radical; Jesus, the kindly shepherd, Jesus …? There are usually elements of truth in all these images of Jesus, but none of them reveals him truly or fully.

Who do you say he is? Who do you want him to be? Our post-modern culture might like to say that Jesus is ‘whoever you want him to be’ – your interpretation, your truth, your belief, your need. But Jesus isn’t a cipher for our own desires and ideas. Jesus comes to us on his terms, not on ours. While he is the greatest cross-cultural missionary ever (think of the Samaritan woman at the well!), he never compromises or fudges his identity or his calling.

The disciples find this out when he quizzes them about people’s take on him. ‘Who do the crowds say I am?’ And then, pressing his question home: ‘Who do you say that I am?’ Peter has his epiphany moment: a sudden insight that Jesus is the promised Messiah of God. But Jesus won’t let that insight be hijacked by Peter’s desires and ideas. He immediately explains what God’s Messiah must be and endure: suffering, rejection, execution, and finally resurrection.  Jesus is the suffering servant king.

What have we projected onto Jesus that says more about us and our needs and desires? What might Jesus say to you and me through his word, to clarify his true identity and calling? How might this revelation of who he is (‘I AM’!) challenge and change our walk as his disciples?

**Lord, continue to give us epiphanies to see you straight and true, on your terms, not our own. And give us the courage to follow you. Amen.**

Wednesday 20 January 2021

# John the Baptist’s epiphany

by Pauline Simonsen

**‘I myself did not know him, but … I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God’ (John 1:33,34).**

Read John 1:29–42

My husband is good at doing jigsaws. I am not. I can persevere and finally conquer the edges (unless it’s the sky), and perhaps some detailed sections with lots of visual clues. But I quickly tire, and my husband takes over, slowly and carefully piecing it all together.

John the Baptist put together the different pieces of the jigsaw about the Messiah, long before anyone else did. Today’s reading shows his ‘aha!’ moment when he finally places several completed sections together and gets the big picture.

God told John to preach and baptise for repentance, a wilderness voice preparing the way for the coming Messiah. That’s the ‘Isaiah’ section if you like. Then there’s another jigsaw section about the greater one coming after John, though he existed before John. In yet another section, God prepares John to recognise this great one, God’s chosen Messiah. John will know him when the Spirit descends as a dove and rests on him after his baptism.

So, when Jesus of Nazareth comes to be baptised by John, and it all happens as God has forewarned, John has his epiphany. He sees Jesus for who he truly is, as God manifest in human form. Suddenly John catches a glimpse of God’s whole plan: that God’s Son has come to be the sacrificial lamb who will atone for the sin of the whole world. And John understands how his own baptism ministry has enabled Jesus to be revealed to Israel.

Under the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, John puts the jigsaw together and perceives God’s great plan and his own small role in it. He understands that he is to share his epiphany insight with others, to direct them to Jesus Christ (which he immediately does in the following verses). John is clear about Jesus’ pre-eminence and his own servant role. ‘He must become greater, and I must become less’ (John 3:30).

God’s great plan calls for our participation and service, but it’s not all about us. It’s about Jesus. He is the design bringing the whole jigsaw picture together. Our task is simply to point people to the picture!

**Lord God, give us clarity to see your great redemption plan and the humility to know our place in it. Amen.**

Thursday 21 January 2021

# The epiphany of the cross

by Pauline Simonsen

**‘Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”’ (John 12:23).**

Read John 12:20–26

D-Day has arrived. Zero hour.

All through John’s gospel, Jesus is waiting for his hour of glory to arrive. Wow! Is it finally here – his moment to ascend Herod’s throne and wrest the kingdom of Israel from Roman control?

No. Jesus’ hour of glorification, sacrifice and multiplication will be when he is ‘lifted up from the earth to draw all people’ (John 12:32). He means death by crucifixion.

Jesus realises that zero hour has arrived when the Greeks come, asking to see him. The Gentile world is knocking at the door. Jesus knows that it’s time to reveal the mystery of the cross. If the Greeks want to see this famous Jesus of Nazareth, they need to see the wheat seed dying: the Son of Man on a cross lifted up for all the world to see, then buried in a tomb and planted in the earth. From this planting will come new life for all people and a great, continuing harvest of souls.

We are also the Greeks in the story, wanting to see Jesus, wanting to get a personal touch of his majesty, wanting a word or a miracle from him. But are we willing to see Jesus truly, lifted up in hideous crucifixion, and then planted in the earth? Even more, are we Greeks willing to follow him on his pioneering path of love and sacrifice, by being planted ourselves?

In our baptism, we died to sin and were buried with Christ. Wheat grain, buried in the ground. But then we were raised with him into new life! Through baptism, the cross becomes our place of death and life, of sacrifice and abundance.

Jesus calls us to a daily surrender to the dark earth; a daily dying and planting and rising to new life; a daily baptismal rebirth. Because, paradoxically, this way our lives will be fruitful and abundant. This is the epiphany of Jesus’ cross. This is his invitation to you and me today.

**Draw us again and again to your cross, Lord Jesus, to die and rise with you there. Crack open the wheat kernel of our lives and bring forth your abundant life in us. Feed the world, Lord, through us. Amen.**

Friday 22 January 2021

# Our epiphany

by Pauline Simonsen

**‘Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?’ (John 14:10a).**

Read John 14:5–14

Jesus’ friends were troubled and anxious, struggling to understand. Jesus had said he was going away, but where was he going? They protested: ‘We don’t know the way to where ever it is you’re going!’

Jesus tried to make it clear: ‘I’m going home to my Father’, he said. And of course, the disciples replied, ‘Lord, show us the Father!’

They couldn’t see yet, so they pleaded to be shown. The disciples’ epiphany came later, at Pentecost. Old John sees now though, recording it decades later. He understands that Jesus is in the Father, and the Father is in Jesus; that Messiah and Father are one God. Jesus the Son is the image of his Abba: doing his Father’s work and will, speaking his Father’s words, bringing glory and honour to his Father.

When Jesus stood before a desperately puzzled Philip, saying, ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?’, John understands that this was God the Father speaking through the Son to benighted Philip.

When I first understood these astounding, beautiful, moving verses in John 14, I had my own epiphany. I realised that my Jesus shows me God the Father’s heart, in his own being. When I look at Jesus, I see God, our Father. They are one.

Many people separate God the Father and God the Son, imagining an angry, demanding Old Testament God who is too holy and scary to approach. They fasten instead on the human Jesus, the good shepherd, the gracious healer of the New Testament. But Jesus’ great revelation is this: ‘I am in the Father and the Father is in me’. One God, the same God from beginning to end, a God of love and grace and justice. God who is with us, for us. For you.

How do we come to know this Heavenly Father? Through his Son. Our Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. Look to Jesus, revealed on the cross, and know God the Father’s heart for you.

**Holy Spirit, reveal to us our Heavenly Father in the face of his Son. Loving God, draw us into the mystery and wonder of your triune self. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Saturday 23 January 2021

# Epiphany at Ruapehu

by Pauline Simonsen

**‘He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken’ (Psalm 62:6).**

Read Psalm 62:5–12

We were travelling over the Central Plateau of New Zealand’s North Island, which is normally a barren, desert-like landscape of tussock, dominated by three great looming mountains. But we had been overtaken by a phenomenal rainstorm, with horizontal rain and almost zero visibility. It was very dangerous, with great sheets of water on the road. Our car slowed to a crawl as we strained to follow the white line on the side of the road, which was all we could see in the grey driving rain. It felt like we were the only living things out there in this elemental chaos. Occasionally, the lights of another car would loom out of the stormy darkness, reassuring us. But we passed cars pulled up on the verge, and one had even slid off the road into the drain alongside. Others were not faring so well.

We crept across the Central Plateau in this streaming darkness, all sixty kilometres of it. It was only as we were descending that the weather-bomb passed. The rain began to ease, visibility improved, and I became aware of the sunlight shining behind us. I looked back over my shoulder, and suddenly, where there had been only grey rain and gloom for the last half hour, I could now see the majestic, mighty presence of Mt Ruapehu. There was sunshine behind it and shining all around it.

It took my breath away. You would never have known it was there before. The black rainclouds and gloom had utterly hidden it. But it was always there; it hadn't moved. Of course, it hadn’t – not that great mighty rock!

We all experience ‘rainstorms’ in our lives when darkness is closing in, and we are scared, unsure and frightened of what lies ahead because we can't see! Know that your great God, your Ruapehu God, stands at your shoulder – even if you can't see him! He is immovable. He is the rock of your salvation, the rock eternal. He is going nowhere.

The psalmist says, ‘power belongs to God, and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord’. Yes, believe it. Your Ruapehu God is profoundly present. He hears when you cry out for help, and he will act for you in his wisdom and compassion.

**God, our mighty rock, our very present help in times of trouble, help us not to fear, even though we lose sight of you in the rainstorms of our life. Remind us of the mountain hidden in the clouds, and give us an epiphany of your eternal presence and steadfast love. Amen.**

Sunday 24 January 2021

# Seen and loved

by Sonia Hulme

**‘As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen’ (Mark 1:16).**

Read Mark 1:14–20

In today’s reading, we see Jesus at the very beginning of his earthly ministry, assembling the group who would become his 12 disciples. These are the ones who would spend the next three years travelling with, eating with, living with and learning from him.

Three of them would become part of his inner circle, including Simon. It seems this might not have been his first encounter with Jesus. The Gospel of John records that it was Simon’s brother Andrew who had first introduced them. Over the next three years, though Jesus and Simon were master and servant, they also became close friends. Jesus renamed him Peter, and he was the first disciple to recognise Jesus as Messiah, the one promised by God to save his people.

No matter the exact timing or circumstances of their meeting, Simon Peter’s story began with being seen by Jesus as he toiled away at his everyday job. He saw into Peter’s heart, which was capable of great love but also deeply flawed, and called him anyway. The beginning of Peter's life-changing kingdom adventure was being seen in all his humanity and loved despite his imperfections.

It’s no different for you and me. Jesus sees you toiling away at your everyday tasks. He sees you, and calls you into deep and intimate friendship with him and then on into his kingdom work. Where does he see you today? Perhaps you are not a fisherman but employed in some other vocation? Or you are retired or struggling to find work? Jesus issues you the same invitation. Might he be saying to you, ‘I see you; I know you; I love you. Come; follow me, and take part in what I’m already doing in the world. Come on a life-changing kingdom adventure …’

**Thank you, Lord, that you see me where I am today, and you love me. Your seeing of me frees me into life. Help me take up your invitation to friendship and join, with joy, your kingdom work in the world. Amen.**