



The New Epistle

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January



THE EPIPHANY

OUR CALLING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

As 2017 came to a close and 2018 opened, many of us breathed a sigh of relief, and said, “Thank goodness that year is over! What a year it’s been!” What a year indeed! A year that seemed full of so many negatives. We saw it for most of the year in the politics of oppression unleashed on our country, in all its ugliness. We saw a great number of much-loved celebrities, from actors and actresses to musicians and reformers depart this life. For so many of us, as we sat watching the events of the months transpire, died inside a little bit; certainly all the ugliness and oppression will do that.

Unfortunately, it is likely that at least the first part of 2018 will be more of the same. Indeed, we see a threat to our fragile earth with the pending opening of all America’s ocean waters being opened to oil drilling. Other regulations that curbed the harm we do to our environment (and consequently to ourselves) being rolled back by our government leaders in a way that stands at odds with our mandate as humans to be stewards of the earth.

Jesus himself – as shown on the Gospels – dealt with very similar situations, in that the existing laws could be highly detrimental to life itself. Jesus put human life above the law; that he repeatedly sinned under the law by healing on the Sabbath is testimony to this. He was frequently challenged by the authorities of his day for things he did and said. And for those things he was condemned as a sinner, a heretic, and a blasphemer.

But a carefully study of his teachings as they have been given to us in the Gospels reveals a wondrous glory: his vision of human equality in God and the sacredness of every individual. It was this vision that subverted the entire order on which both political and religious society was based. Even today, nearly 2,000 years later, it hasn’t changed one bit.

Jesus’ teachings challenged the patriarchal order on which Jewish and Roman society was based. In a world obsessed with power he offered a vision of powerlessness and the powerful vulnerability of love. He presented in his life and teachings a vision of radical and all-embracing egalitarianism intended to bring an end to the dogmas and institutions that enslaved women, separated races, kept the poor starving, and the rich rotting in their own prisons of selfish luxury. His life and teaching enacted a way of subverting all of the existing system’s beliefs, practises, goals, and “truths.”

And Jesus calls us to “go and do likewise.”

In its earliest form, this emerging movement – called “The Way” – was concerned not with doctrine or dogma or theology, but with taking care of those in need in the community, and addressing community needs. Their worship was service to one another, taking seriously Jesus teaching that “as ye have done to the least of these, ye have done unto me.”

It is all about seeing the divine in each other. Goodness knows this is sometimes *much* easier *said* than *done*! All we need do is look at our political leadership to discover this! Then to many of our friends or family members who also may endorse and even celebrate things that are contrary to what Jesus calls us to.

It isn’t easy. But with regular practise, it starts to become do-able. At least a little bit, and we can grow from there. But we must also remember Jesus’ own admonition, that if we are not welcomed in one city, then we are to shake the dust from our feet and move on. Still, on all things let us remember the admonition of the prophet Micah, whose words lie at the heart of the Gospel: “Seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.”

As we look around our country here in the infancy of the new year, we see here and there change for the better taking place. Even those who once supported oppression and prejudice are beginning to see the light, although it often happens when they find themselves the targets of the very oppression or prejudice they once supported. When that happens – that “aha!” moment – we call that an epiphany. It is an awakening, through discovery.

Going into 2018 we face much uncertainty. We see leaders of two countries talking about nuclear warfare. We see our own Executive Branch of government in complete chaos, with a Legislative Branch that seems to delight in the oppression of the very people they are supposed to represent.

But there is help in the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. The Lion of Judah was for the Jews a powerful symbol of charity and justice, and was also associated with Jesus. The mitzvot of Tzedekah teaches the responsibility that each of us has to be "our brother's keeper" and make a difference in the lives of others. Tzedakah literally translates to 'justice' and it involves making acts of devotion toward the needs of others a central focus in one's life. Whether it be a monetary gift or a gift of one's time, the power of the act of tzedakah cannot be overstated.

As we go forward into the many uncertainties ahead of us, may we always remember the transformative teachings of Jesus, the Lion of Judah, who saw all humans as equal in God, no matter their race, colour, creed, or gender. May we always remember that we are our brother's keeper at all times, that we should always be prepared to go that extra mile for a member of our human family in need.

Jesus subverted the system by healing on the Sabbath. It made all the difference for the one being healed.

May we all go and do likewise! May the year bring us and those around us many epiphanies of the wonders of God's love in action! Taking a cue from the famous directive once issued by President Kennedy, might we ask ourselves: “*What can I do for my community? What can I do to make a difference?*”

Epiphany is when the Magi “discovered” the Christ child. May we discover the Christ within each other through our words and actions, so that we may discover the Christ within ourselves!

Blessings and Peace!



Merry Christmas to all our Old Calendar friends and family!

December 25 in the Julian calendar falls on January 7 of the Gregorian calendar.

RT. REV. PHILLIPS BROOKS

This issue of *The New Epistle* looks at a little known leader of the Episcopal Church, Bishop Phillips Brooks. He became rector of Trinity Church, Boston in 1869. His only ambition in life was to be a parish priest. While at Trinity Church, he was influential in the design of the new church's interior architecture, and had built the first free-standing Altar in the United States. He also built a *synthronon* – a feature taken from early basilicas - in the apse which provided seating for the clergy. Curiously, until 1888 there was no pulpit, and sermons were preached from the rector's stall on the south side of the chancel. And although he despaired of Anglo-Catholic ritualism, he championed many aspects of the liturgical movement including congregational singing at the liturgy.



Brooks was consecrated as Bishop of Massachusetts in 1891, and served but 15 months until his death in 1893.

The son of a wealthy Brahmin family in Boston, he was baptised as a Unitarian, and received his education at Boston Latin School, and later at Virginia Theological Seminary. He did not feel at home in seminary, scorned “the anti-intellectualism of the Evangelicals,” and drank deeply out of Schleiermacher (the “Father of Modern Liberal Theology”).

He did not much preach on Atonement or vicarious sacrifice, but rather, his sermons showed he was a deeply spiritual man, stressing the importance of looking inward, and also the importance of our relationship with God as well as with one another.

He is commemorated on January 23.

Herewith are a few short sermons by Bishop Brooks, for our consideration to read, mark, and inwardly digest as we enter into a new year that already presents us with many challenges, but also will be seen to provide us with many opportunities of service.

TEXT: *Isaiah 55:5*

What is it to be a spiritual man and to live spiritually? A spiritual man is a man who deals with the spirits and the souls of things, and lives for them.

Here are two money-making men. One of them values his money for the comfortable uses he can put it to; the other is not satisfied until he has got at the heart of riches, and absorbed his wealth into his character, and made himself by it a richer nature and a fuller man. Here are two religious men. One of them rejoices in religion for the good it does. He says that it secures order in this world, and saves suffering in the world to come. Another man feeds his heart on the very substance of religion itself. To commune with God, and love Him and obey Him, is the very life of life.

Spirituality is not an attainment, an acquisition of the nature; it is a quality of the nature. It is not a thing to be; it is a way of being everything. It must be very sweet and strong when this Judea-consciousness really takes possession of a man and fills him. It is not pride or conceit. It is something far sacred than that. But into his ears there comes a message from God: "I have appointed you to help your brethren. I have taught you to see the soul of things. I have filled you with the mystery of living, the awfulness of the soul." "Behold, thou shalt call a nation which thou knowest not, and nations which know not thee shall run unto thee, because of the Lord thy God!"

If in any way God is making you a Judea — if He is using you for one of His gathering and distributing points of spiritual life, be satisfied. There is no nobler work which anybody in this world can do than that. To know God so that other souls may know Him from us; to be in any way a deepener and enlightener of the lives of our brethren — what is there for a man to thank God for like that? Do we question that question for a moment! Then look at Jesus! See how in Him you have the very pattern and perfection of that life. Jesus was among men what Judea was among the nations.

The other exhortation is for Assyria and Egypt—for men of worldly ways and hard, unyielding natures. If you do not feel the power of Judaism, you ought to be very much afraid about yourself. If a spiritual life can be lived right by your side, and you receive from it no rebuke or invitation, then beware! That is a terrible condition. The spring wind calls to the rock, and it has no green answer to send back. God calls to you by His voice in an enlightened soul, and you are dead.

TEXT: *Luke 3:4*

Not one little brown and withered leaf falls to the ground on one of the November days but the shape of the plant is changed; so there is not one little act of yours, one whispered prayer that His kingdom may come, but becomes a factor in the world's redemption. If I can only place one little golden brick in the pavement of the Lord's highway, I will place it there, that coming generations may walk thereon to the heavenly city.

TEXT: *Daniel 10:7*

Many and many of these men whom we see plodding on in their dusty ways are travelling with visions in their souls. Nobody knew it but themselves and God. Once years ago they saw a light. They knew it, only for a moment, what companionships, what attainments, they were made for! That light has never faded. It is the soul of good things which they are doing in the world to-day. It makes them sure when other men think their faith is gone. It will be with them to the end, until they come to all it prophesies.

The Candle of the Lord (*excerpts*)

TEXT: *Proverbs 20:27*

The essential connection between the life of God and the life of man is the great truth of the world; and that is the truth which Solomon sets forth in the striking words which I have chosen for my text this morning. The picture which the words suggest is very simple. An unlighted candle is standing in the darkness and someone comes to light it. A blazing bit of paper holds the fire at first, but it is vague and

fitful. It flares and wavers and at any moment may go out. But the vague, uncertain, flaring blaze touches the candle, and the candle catches fire and at once you have a steady flame. It burns straight and clear and constant. The candle gives the fire a manifestation-point for all the room which is illuminated by it. The candle is glorified by the fire and the fire is manifested by the candle. The two bear witness that they were made for one another by the way in which they fulfill each other's life ...

I think that we are ready now to turn to Solomon and read his words again and understand them. "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord," he says. God is the fire of this world, its vital principle, a warm pervading presence everywhere. What thing of outward nature can so picture to us the mysterious, the subtle, the quick, live, productive and destructive thought, which has always lifted men's hearts and solemnized their faces when they have said the word God, as this strange thing, – so Heavenly, so unearthly, so terrible, and yet so gracious; so full of creativeness, and yet so quick and fierce to sweep whatever opposes it out of its path, – this marvel, this beauty and glory and mystery of fire? . . . The fire of the Lord has found the candle of the Lord, and burns clear and steady, guiding and cheering instead of bewildering and frightening us, just so soon as a man who is obedient to God has begun to catch and manifest His nature.

With what care must the man be made whose spirit is to be the candle of the Lord! It is his spirit which God is to kindle with Himself. Therefore the spirit must be the precious part of him.

This sermon may be found in its entirety [here](#).



St John Chrysostom was born in Antioch ca. 349 to Greek parents from Syria. He was ordained as a deacon in 381 by Saint Meletius of Antioch who was not then in communion with Alexandria and Rome. After the death of Meletius, John separated himself from the followers of Meletius, without joining Paulinus, the rival of Meletius for the bishopric of Antioch. But after the death of Paulinus he was ordained a presbyter (priest) in 386 by Evagrius, the successor of Paulinus. He was destined later to bring about reconciliation between Flavian I of Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome, thus bringing those three sees into communion for the first time in nearly seventy years.

In Antioch, over the course of twelve years (386–397), John gained popularity because of the eloquence of his public speaking at the Golden Church, Antioch's cathedral, especially his insightful expositions of Bible passages and moral teaching. The most valuable of his works from this period are his Homilies on various books of the Bible. He emphasised charitable giving and was concerned with the spiritual and temporal needs of the poor. He spoke against abuse of wealth and personal property:

Do you wish to honour the body of Christ? Do not ignore him when he is naked. Do not pay him homage in the temple clad in silk, only then to neglect him outside where he is cold and ill-clad. He who said: "This is my body" is the same who said: "You saw me hungry and you gave me no food", and "Whatever you did to the least of my brothers you did also to me"... What good is it if the Eucharistic table is overloaded with golden

chalices when your brother is dying of hunger? Start by satisfying his hunger and then with what is left you may adorn the altar as well.

His straightforward understanding of the Scriptures – in contrast to the Alexandrian tendency towards allegorical interpretation – meant that the themes of his talks were practical, explaining the Bible's application to everyday life. Such straightforward preaching helped Chrysostom to garner popular support. He founded a series of hospitals in Constantinople to care for the poor.

One incident that happened during his service in Antioch illustrates the influence of his homilies. When Chrysostom arrived in Antioch, Flavian, the bishop of the city, had to intervene with Emperor Theodosius I on behalf of citizens who had gone on a rampage mutilating statues of the Emperor and his family. During the weeks of Lent in 387, John preached more than twenty homilies in which he entreated the people to see the error of their ways. These made a lasting impression on the general population of the city: many pagans converted to Christianity as a result of the homilies. As a result, Theodosius' vengeance was not as severe as it might have been.

Archbishop of Constantinople

John Chrysostom confronting Aelia Eudoxia, in a 19th-century painting by Jean-Paul Laurens.

In the autumn of 397, John was appointed Archbishop of Constantinople, after having been nominated without his knowledge by the eunuch Eutropius. He had to leave Antioch in secret due to fears that the departure of such a popular figure would cause civil unrest.

During his time as Archbishop he adamantly refused to host lavish social gatherings, which made him popular with the common people, but unpopular with wealthy citizens and the clergy. His reforms of the clergy were also unpopular. He told visiting regional preachers to return to the churches they were meant to be serving—without any payout.

John's social and religious world was formed by the continuing and pervasive presence of paganism in the life of the city. One of his regular topics was the paganism in the culture of Constantinople, and in his homilies he thunders against popular pagan amusements: the theatre, horseraces, and the revelry surrounding holidays. In particular, he criticizes Christians for taking part in such activities:

"If you ask [Christians] who is Amos or Obadiah, how many apostles there were or prophets, they stand mute; but if you ask them about the horses or drivers, they answer with more solemnity than sophists or rhetors".

One of the recurring features of John's homilies is his emphasis on care for the needy. Echoing themes found in the Gospel of Matthew, he calls upon the rich to lay aside materialism in favor of helping the poor, often employing all of his rhetorical skills to shame wealthy people to abandon conspicuous consumption:

"Do you pay such honor to your excrements as to receive them into a silver chamber-pot when another man made in the image of God is perishing in the cold?"

John Chrysostom is not without some controversy; he was an outspoken critic against Jews and Judaizing Christians. In a series of eight sermons he denounced Christians who were taking part in Jewish festivals and other observances. This was a time when Christianity was becoming almost entirely a Gentile movement, and separating itself from its Jewishness.

John was also a harsh critic of homosexuality, and was very influential in shaping early Christian thought against it, and also changed the teachings of the story of the destruction of Sodom from that of a place of inhospitality to one of sexual transgressions. Author Robert H. Allen describes the Chrysostom's sermon on Romans 1:26-27 as the "climax and consummation of homophobia in the late classical world". Much of Christianity's long and sordid history of persecution of LGBT finds its origins in the teachings of this otherwise most distinguished man, whose other teachings and sermons often tend to stand in odd and perplexing contrast to his prejudiced views. Like so many other great and notable saints – and so many even today - John Chrysostom presents a bit of a conundrum.

But while many things change – we know and believe that Jews and LGBT are all God's blessed creations, for one! – some things remain steadfast and unchanging, such as the wondrous and loving nature of that Mystery we call God, so beautifully expressed in John's Easter Homily. In it, he reminds us that whether rich or poor, early or late, fasting or non-fasting, attentive or negligent, ALL are welcome at God's Table:

If anyone is devout and a lover of God, let them enjoy this beautiful and radiant festival.
 If anyone is a grateful servant, let them, rejoicing, enter into the joy of his Lord.
 If anyone has wearied themselves in fasting, let them now receive recompense.

If anyone has labored from the first hour, let them today receive the just reward.
 If anyone has come at the third hour, with thanksgiving let them feast.
 If anyone has arrived at the sixth hour, let them have no misgivings; for they shall suffer no loss.
 If anyone has delayed until the ninth hour, let them draw near without hesitation.
 If anyone has arrived even at the eleventh hour, let them not fear on account of tardiness.

For the Master is gracious and receives the last even as the first; He gives rest to him that comes at the eleventh hour, just as to him who has labored from the first.

He has mercy upon the last and cares for the first; to the one He gives, and to the other He is gracious.
 He both honors the work and praises the intention.

Enter all of you, therefore, into the joy of our Lord, and, whether first or last, receive your reward.

O rich and poor, one with another, dance for joy!
 O you ascetics and you negligent, celebrate the day!
 You that have fasted and you that have disregarded the fast, rejoice today!
 The table is rich-laden: feast royally, all of you!
 The calf is fatted: let no one go forth hungry!

Let all partake of the feast of faith. Let all receive the riches of goodness.
 Let no one lament their poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed.
 Let no one mourn their transgressions, for pardon has dawned from the grave.
 Let no one fear death, for the Saviour's death has set us free.

He that was taken by death has annihilated it!
 He descended into Hades and took Hades captive!
 He embittered it when it tasted His flesh!

And anticipating this, Isaiah exclaimed: "*Hades was embittered when it encountered Thee in the lower regions*".

It was embittered, for it was abolished!
 It was embittered, for it was mocked!
 It was embittered, for it was purged!
 It was embittered, for it was despoiled!
 It was embittered, for it was bound in chains!
 It took a body and came upon God!
 It took earth and encountered Heaven!
 It took what it saw, but crumbled before what it had not seen!

O death, where is thy sting?
 O Hades, where is thy victory?

Christ is risen, and you are overthrown!
 Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!
 Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice!
 Christ is risen, and life reigns!
 Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in a tomb!

For Christ, being raised from the dead, has become the first-fruits of them that have slept.
 To Him be glory and might unto the ages of ages.
 Amen.

What a wondrous and uplifting vision of universality this is! As we go forward into 2018, let us take to heart these words, and **live** them, for all of us fall into at least one of the six categories!

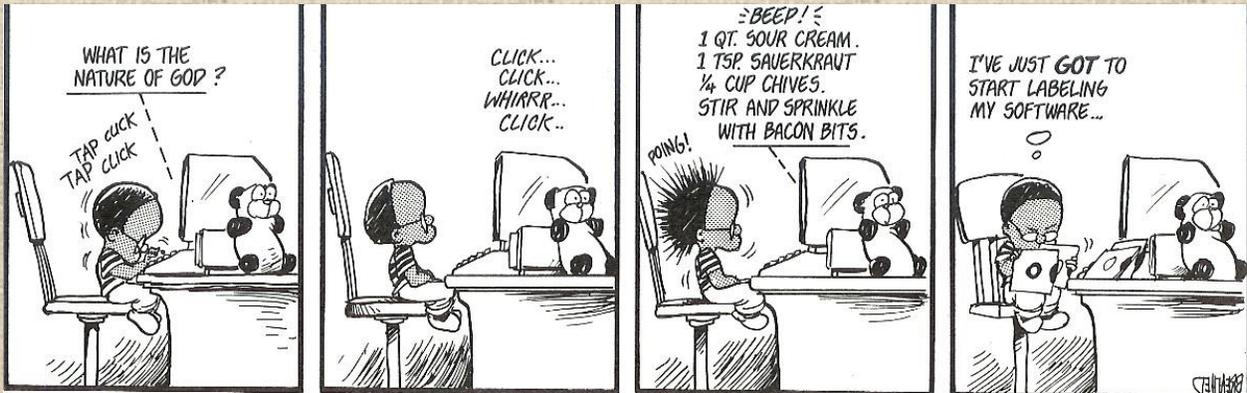
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(See John 2:1-11) 05-25-2015

WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE TO TURN WINE BACK TO WATER?



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03-23-2015

EVEN PASTOR EVENTUALLY CONCEDED THAT THIS PARTICULAR SERMON RAN ON MUCH TOO LONG