

“Yes, we know...and EUREKA!”

First sermon in nine-week “Yes, And...” series: Passion + Humility

Yes, you feel what you feel...and you can practice humility.

Matthew 2:1-12 (NRSV)

Well, it happened!

In the midst of all of our decorations and gift exchanges and homemade cookies and cocktails – it happened.

In the midst of people traveling all over the world by plane, train, and automobile – it happened.

In the midst of the Broncos having a subpar season – it happened.

In the midst of the United States government shut down – it happened.

In the midst of people living on the streets of Denver in single digit temps and people trying to cross borders and walls all over the world – it happened.

In the midst of your loved one’s illness – it happened.

In the midst of the changes in *your* home or work life – it happened.

In the midst of your resolutions to exercise *more* and sleep *more* and go to church *more* while eating *less* and worrying *less* and working *less* – it happened.

Jesus was born. Yep. “*Go tell it on the mountain.*” Out of the pages of this sacred text and into our world – Jesus was born...*Again.*

So, have you taken this new born babe home yet from the hospital, I mean, manger? Are you getting any sleep...are you adjusting to how this baby is rocking your world...drawing every ounce of your attention and every ounce of your energy and making you realize you didn’t really understand just how deep love could go?

Or have you left Jesus in the manger here at church...content to visit him once a week for an hour or two. After all, you don’t need to hear his every coo and cry or see him waddle then walk. You’ll just catch the highlights when you’re here on Sundays, right?

You see, if Jesus was a real baby born into our lives that we were expected to take home and care for – our lives would be changed forever...they'd have a whole new orientation...we'd tilt and revolve on the axis of this Christ Child.

But he's not a real baby – at least not for us today. He's in our hearts, not in our homes.

We know what it means when a baby is born...when a new life comes into our lives and everything about that baby depends on our attention and love. Even if we haven't had children, we know this just from holding a baby for 5 minutes. This is not something we can just toss over our shoulder and forget about. If we try to do that...that baby won't let us.

Jesus is a different kind of baby. True, he doesn't want us to forget about him. He even gives us this meal (point at communion table) saying, "*Do this in remembrance of me.*" But he's also not going to throw a temper tantrum if we neglect him. He does not *demand* our attention and love, he *desires* it...and not for his sake, but for the sake of others, the sake of the world.

This means that *we* have to figure out how to make Jesus real for our lives every year all over again. He's not gonna do it for us. It will take some serious searching and seeking on our part.

When I was home last week in Texas my nephews (ages 5 and 2) wanted to play hide and seek – over and over and over again. Which was fine. Except that as time went on each time I hid...they either counted faster and faster ("1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10!...*ready or not here we come!*") or they'd skip numbers ("1, 3, 5, 10!...*ready or not here we come!*"), or they'd get excited and just stop counting before reaching 10 ("1, 2, 3...*ready or not, here we come!*"). Whoa kiddos! I'm not ready...I haven't even had a chance to get out of the room, let alone hide!

I needed more time. Didn't matter to William and Jack. They just kept giggling and counting faster each time and I was never ready for them when they opened their eyes.

Anybody feel that way with Jesus? Ready or not – here he comes. No matter what is going on in our lives or in the world – ready or not – here he

comes...whether we have the time to devote to him or not. Couldn't he wait to come until things settle down at work? Or until the house renovations are done? Or until the treatment is over?

Here's the thing about Jesus though...when we mark time by the life of Jesus, it doesn't matter what is going on in our lives or in the world (or if we're ready or not)...Jesus' life goes on. His birth, his ministry, his death, his resurrection...every year we cycle through these events and we replay Jesus' life in the midst of our lives with the hopes that somehow – something will change. Yet if the events of Jesus' life are just playing like a broken record stuck on repeat – we all know what happens. We tune it out. We stop listening. We leave the baby in the manger and we head out to exchange our gifts at the mall.

What if it didn't have to be that way? What if instead of replaying Jesus' life in the midst of our lives...we saw our lives as happening around his?

Yes, Jesus, Emmanuel, *God-with-us*, does mean that God came to earth to be with us – to walk and talk and teach us all how to love and live. God

breaks through the veil of other-worldliness to say that *this* world, here and now, matters.

And – Jesus did not fix all the woes of his day just by showing up. Why? Because it's not Jesus' job to fix all of our woes. Sure, he brings love. He brings grace. He brings reconciliation and healing. He doesn't bring super glue and duct tape and the latest, greatest all-in-one power tool.

It's not Jesus' job to fix all of our woes. It's our job to fixate on Jesus so that we stop (or at least slow down) our woes...

...So that we stop seeing other people as 'them' and instead see all people as 'us.' So that we stop creating greed and envy by worshipping wealth and power and instead become satisfied in spirit by serving others and sharing what we have with anyone who needs it. So that we stop building an idol out of "work and busy-ness" and instead create time for relationships and community. So that we stop seeing suffering as punishment and as a result of "something we must have done in our life to deserve this" and instead see suffering as one of the greatest teachers in our lives...and as something that is

part of the human condition, not an abnormality but a normality. Suffering will happen. It's as universal as breathing.

And so what would our world look like if we were to stop waiting on Jesus to fix all of our problems and instead were to fixate on Jesus so that we begin to see solutions?

Epiphany is the season in which we look for the “showing forth” or “the revelation” of Christ in the world. And we begin this season today by recalling the journey of the wise ones, the astrologers, the scholarly travelers from the East, to seek the Christ child. They fixated on a star until it stopped. Then they fixated on Jesus. And then, after worshipping and giving gifts, after experiencing this epiphany of God's presence being made real in the world – they had their own epiphany or moment of revelation. And that moment didn't fix everything...but it did fix something.

I'll come back to that...first I just want to take a minute to remind us that “nothing about the circumstances surrounding

Jesus' birth was ideal. Mary was pregnant out of wedlock. When it was time for Jesus to be born, Mary and Joseph were on the road due to political forces that were beyond their control. There was no good place to have the baby and so they ended up in a humble stable...and it's doubtful the conditions were sanitary by any standard!

[Even more], Jesus was born into a time of political and religious upheaval. Herod, an insecure and power-hungry man, was king at the time, creating a very dangerous environment for anyone who threatened him. His violent actions and reactions showed little regard for human life. [The question from the Wise Ones about the ‘king of the Jews’] sent Herod into a jealous rage which caused him to order what is now known as “the massacre of the innocents”—the murder of all children two years and under.”¹

You see, Jesus came into a very specific moment in history that was far from peaceful or perfect. It was actually quite horrific.

¹ Ruth Haley Barton, “Epiphany: Celebrating the Imperfect Journey,” *Transforming Center* (3 Jan. 2019). Accessed on 6 Jan. 2019 at

<https://transformingcenter.org/2019/01/epiphany-celebrating-the-imperfect-journey/>.

And yet, in all of the chaos around them...the Wise Ones knew enough to know that they didn't know it all...so they set out to search...they took a risk...to look for a child they knew nothing about – that wasn't even one of “their own” so to speak).

As Ruth Haley Barton writes,

“We are all seekers and none of us does our seeking perfectly. The wise ones show us this. [It's a] story about our longing for more of God than we have right now...[like the wise ones], this longing compels us to move beyond the borders of life as we know it in order to discover a deeper spiritual reality. The story of the wise ones is a story... about seeking and not even knowing what we are seeking until we stumble upon it where we least expect it. “A good journey begins with knowing where we are and being willing to go somewhere else,” as Richard Rohr reminds us.”²

The wise ones knew who they were – experts in astrology and travel and yet they – listened to whatever warned them in a dream to go home by another road. They changed their plans based on something new that

they learned. Something that they had to be open to hear...something they didn't ignore. And their humility in listening to that dream and not assuming that they knew the best way to travel because they had traveled so much and so far --- their humility in listening and in course-correcting – changed the story...not for every child, tragically – but for one, thankfully.

They could not change Herod's terror by fixating on Jesus – Herod was still a brutal killer. Yet by fixating on Jesus and the wonder and awe he instilled in them, they could change their own hearts, their own minds, their own abilities to listen and learn...and it made a difference for one child – even though they didn't even know they were making a difference! They probably had an epiphany moment without even knowing it. They probably never even knew that the decision they made saved Jesus' life.

The spiritual life is like that...when we fixate on Jesus we don't always get to see what things are fixed because of us. We are just faithful. And we follow. And we care more about doing *what* is right than

² Barton, *ibid.*

worrying about *who* is right or who gets the credit.

As we move into the new year continuing our “*Yes, And...*” theme, we begin with the set of spiritual practices: *Passion + Humility: Yes, you feel what you feel* (or know what you know)...*and you can practice humility*. Our emotions and passions are what make us who we are. To be passionate about a person, a cause, or a value is a great thing. To be knowledgeable about a certain area of expertise is great. And yet it’s important for us to remember that what might be *our* passion may not be someone else’s passion.

Have you ever gotten caught in a conversation with someone who won’t stop talking about something at their work or something they read or saw on TV...and you have no idea what they are talking about nor do you care? Well, we’ve all been that person before too, haven’t we?

Here’s the challenge: when we look at someone else’s passion and have no idea why they care about that issue or cause, can we take a step back in humility and seek to learn from them why they are passionate about

that? What do they see that we have yet to see?

The season of Epiphany is about seeing differently, about discovering something new about God, and in turn, about ourselves. Or – the reverse. Sometimes we discover something new about ourselves, and it allows us to see God in a whole different light.

Like the wise ones, when we have an “epiphany” in our life, it often helps us have humility because we learn something new about ourselves or the world, and we are perhaps corrected or re-directed about previous held beliefs or thoughts...and it changes our path.

The thing is – when I hear the word “epiphany” I often think of an instantaneous moment of revelation that almost comes out of nowhere. And while those happen on occasion, the truth is epiphanies happen because we are prepared for them to happen. One way of thinking about it would be to think of an “epiphany” the same way scientists think of a “eureka!” moment.

“When people exclaim Eureka! they are reenacting a legendary event in the life of the Greek

mathematician and inventor Archimedes. While wrestling with the problem of how to determine the purity of gold, [he decided to take a break and he stepped into a bathtub and saw that the water that was displaced when his foot when it was the same weight as the space his foot took up]. He had the sudden realization that the buoyancy of an object placed in water is equal in magnitude to the weight of the water the object displaces. According to one popular version of the legend, he made his discovery at a public bathhouse, whereupon he leapt out of his bath, exclaimed “Heureka! Heureka!” (“I have found it!”), and ran home naked through the streets.”³

Some of the most powerful ideas in the history of science came to their inventors while they were daydreaming or taking a break. Scientist Karl Albrecht says,

“The so-called “eureka” moment, or the “aha” experience, is the culmination of a pre-conscious process known as incubation.

Incubation is a stage in which the thinker has temporarily set aside his or her attempts to solve a problem, and has turned to other thoughts. But behind [the scenes the brain is still working].”⁴

Many of us have had this eureka experience from time to time, right? That flash of insight that suddenly explains something, or shows us how to solve a problem that comes to us when we’re not actually trying to solve the problem!

A research survey of 211 managers and professionals from all over the world revealed where different people were when they had their eureka moments.”⁵ Here are the top 10 places:

1. Showering 11.2%;
2. Sleeping 9.2% (dreaming);
3. Driving 8.6% (my car, motorbike);
4. Walking 8.0% (in nature or walking the dogs);
5. Working out & running 7.2% (jogging);
6. Before sleeping 6.6%;
7. Waking up 6.6%;
8. Talking to others 3.7%
9. Alone 3.2%

³ Accessed on 6 Jan. 2019 at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/eureka>.

⁴ Karl Albrecht, “Have You Experienced “Eureka” Moments?” *Psychology Today* (29 Sept. 2017).

Accessed on 6 Jan. 2019 at

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/brainsnacks/201709/have-you-experienced-eureka-moments>.

⁵ Gijs van Wulfen, “Top 10 Eureka Moments: Shower, Sleep and Drive,” *Innovation Excellence* (23 April 2014). Accessed on 6 Jan. 2019 at <https://www.innovationexcellence.com/blog/2014/04/20/top-10-eureka-moments-shower-sleep-and-drive/>.

10. Always 3.2%

Only 0.6% of the eureka-moments happens “in a brainstorm” or “at work”. This research seems to confirm that that if we stop wrestling so hard to come up with the solution to the problem we’re grappling with and if we step away for a while – we might just get our answer. Of course, we still have to go to work though, to get the stuff to put in the “incubator” so to speak. We have to have done the hard work, the research, ahead of time so that *something* is incubating, right?

A spiritual way to think about this is to realize that while coming to worship and church school and reading your Bible and praying and serving in a missions or ministry capacity may seem like it’s not “getting you anywhere”...think of it as an incubation period. It’s like spiritual conditioning to prepare you for that moment of epiphany or eureka.

Epiphanies will happen because we give what we already know to be true time and space to breathe, to imagine, to expand, to question, to reexamine, to evaluate, and to refine. The wise ones were used to watching for and listening for signs. So it wasn’t completely

foreign for them to have an epiphany moment in a dream. Because it was just a culmination of what they already knew – with a little bit of surprise mixed in. Even Jesus – the greatest epiphany of all – the greatest sign of God’s presence in the world – had an incubation period...it was in the womb...presumably for about 9-10 months.

You see, passion and knowledge are great things. When they are tempered with humility, they grow even stronger. We can never think we know enough about Jesus or life or faith to stop actively working on our spiritual lives. As the Chinese proverb advises, “*Be like the bamboo the higher you grow the deeper you bow.*”

As we look at Passion + Humility, we encourage you to do two things over the next two months...

- 1) Dive more deeply into something you already passionate about
- 2) Step away from that and join in something with someone else that they are passionate about

In this way, being open to learning new things and of

expanding the ways in which we see and understand the world – we also expand the ways in which we see and understand God. You'll be adding more experiences to your "spiritual incubator," if you will...so that that eureka or epiphany moment can happen.

In Prince Caspian (the second book published in the *Chronicles of Narnia* series by C.S. Lewis), there's a moment that describes this kind of "Yes I know, and...Eureka!" really well:

When the Pevensie children are lost in Narnia seeking to find the way into Prince Caspian's camp, the young Lucy experiences a personal visit from the great Aslan, who up to this point has been invisible to her older siblings. As Lucy encounters her old friend, she perceives him to be somehow "bigger" than she remembers from past experience:

"Aslan, you're bigger."

"That is because you are older, little one."

"Not because you are?"

*"I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger."*⁶

That's beautiful, isn't it? We are always growing, and as we grow, so does our understanding and vision of God. Passion + Humility.

A good rule of thumb for knowing whether or not you are having a wild and crazy idea or whether you are having a true epiphany or eureka moment is this:

Does it build upon what you already know to be true, while expanding your heart and your vision just a bit more?

Does it cause you to rethink something through the lens of love and possibility rather than fear?

Does it feel like a bit of a risk...but one that has potential to really change something significant in your life?

If so...then... "Eureka!"

Amen.

⁶ Adam Winters, "Christ, the Lion who Keeps Getting Bigger?" *Standing on Shoulders* (7 Feb. 2011). Accessed on 6 Jan. 2019 at

<https://standingonshoulders.wordpress.com/2011/02/07/christ-the-lion-who-keeps-getting-bigger/>.