

**Lesson: 1 Corinthians 6: 12-20**

**Psalm 139: 1-6**

**The Gospel: John 1: 43-51**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany**

**January 17, 2021**

**“Come and See”**

**Sermon Preached by Rev. Lowell Nelson**

**American Lutheran Church of Sun City**

Peace be to you in this New Year! Thank you God for the gift of Jesus Christ, shining the light of truth that Christ’s love reflects your love for this world. We start with this confidence: Jesus in the flesh in his life and the confidence of the Holy Spirit with us in 2021. It is a simple phrase isn’t it? “Come and see.” It really is the evangelical zeal that you and I are not responsible for convincing anyone that Jesus Christ is Lord. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, but we are asked to participate in this marvelous kingdom of God by inviting people to come and see. To have enlightenment means to have it dwell upon our lives, that Jesus is the One.

I love the church here! Of course, as a pastor you would expect that, but I love it because it has a flow. In the announcements I spoke of Advent and then of Christmas, and now it’s time for Epiphany – that light shining for the three wise men, that Jesus was the one for all the world. And now as we move through this, just re-anchoring these beautiful and profound observations found in our scripture: Epiphany is the manifestation of God. ‘Epi’ – the first part of the phrase – is about this word upon *you*. It has a very personal aspect to it. And then the last part ‘phany’ – or epiphany as we say it – has to do with light. We use this word that it’s the manifestation of God and Jesus Christ. It’s like the light bulb goes off, right? I think of Archimedes’ “Eureka!” This is the Good News, an invitation for a very simple and profound personal faith. I’ve heard that before and it sometimes sounds like it’s *our* work, right? We have to get personally involved in this. I just ask you to realize that our faith is a response faith. God always makes these beautiful first moves. God is a God who *seeks*; God is a God who *brings together*; God is a God who calls *us*.

Psalm 139 is absolutely precious to me; it is taking on new meaning -- we are so excited that our son Andrew and his dear wife Kendra are expecting their first child, our first grandchild! So as I read through Psalm 139, it brings wonderful tears of delight to my life to know that God searches us out from the very beginning. “You encompass me behind, and lay your hand upon me, Lord. For you created my most inmost parts and knit me together in my mother’s womb.” Oh for the joy of seeing ultrasounds, and the tears that come from this absolute mystery and marvelous nature of life, the creation of life through the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are not hidden from God; God knows us. So what does that

mean? Does it feel like someone is involved in your life and judging every aspect? That's not what it is; it's the love of God that knows every aspect of your life. What an epiphany! I challenge you this way: the best way to know yourself is to know God. God knows everything about you and we know that in this life we won't see completely, but in 1 Corinthians 13, we read: "I will be known more fully as I have been fully known."

All of your investment in church, all of your investment in worship, all of your investment in researching and studying the Bible; all of your investment in prayer is a way to understand God's will and love for you, so that you more fully know yourself as a child of God. What an epiphany! It is a beautiful statement of Psalm 139. When I use the word 'personal' I'm not asking for some tremendous or dramatic conversation experience, although thank God for those! It may be an insight for you; it may be a remembrance when God was absolutely real for your life, when you were searching for Jesus, asking "Are you real?" And then you recall the peace that passes all understanding upon your life, that you know that God's love for you was deeply personal at the very core, from the beginning to the end of life and for eternal life forever and ever. What an epiphany! The best way to know yourself is to know God and then reflect upon that in your life.

We are intimately involved with the love of God. It is an epiphany to know that our bodies are not separate. We speak of the body of Christ, but our personal bodies are not separate because we are temples of the Holy Spirit. Now I've heard this used a wee bit judgmentally when someone looks at me (with the extra pounds) and says "Don't you know that you are temple of the Holy Spirit?" Okay, thanks for the encouragement. 😊 It's more profound than external appearance. It is an epiphany to know that God's not out there someplace; the Holy Spirit is within us, the gift of baptism, the gift of that spark of the Spirit. And it is an amazing confidence that we are a temple of the Holy Spirit. This is the love that God has for us: God's involvement in life, the incarnation, the birth of Jesus Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit. As we move through this New Year into Lent and into the Easter season into Pentecost, sometimes we think God sent Jesus to learn about what it is to be human. But Dr. David Bland, a professor at Harding University in Memphis, TN said it this way: "God did not send Jesus in order to know what it was like to be human. Rather, because God already knew us and what it's like to be human, God sent Jesus. God's incarnation in Jesus Christ is for *our* benefit, not for God's. It's for our benefit to know the intimacy and the love of Jesus Christ."

So we move into the Gospel lesson itself... I love the words of Nathaniel (when he was invited by Philip) saying "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" I'm just a bit defensive; when I tell people I'm from Nebraska, they say "oh, yes, I-80 goes through the country cut around a riverbed." If you went north and south there are actually higher

points; it's not all flat like that, and yes we used to have a really good football team (not so much these days, but we have hope.) ☺ It's kind of funny that people don't quite know what to do with that. Well, that's what Nazareth was for someone who was used to areas that were better. I find it interesting that it's not just about geography; it's about anything to do with God's presence. With God's love it doesn't matter who you are or where you're from, because you're tied to the One who knows all and loves all. Your power comes not from where you are, or your background, or your heritage, or what you're doing. Your power comes through the Holy Spirit in your life. This is an epiphany because it frees us up. Can anything good come out of Sun City? Tied to the promises of God and inspired by the Holy Spirit, amen! Can anything good come out of the Grand Canyon synod? The answer is: Tied and inspired by the Holy Spirit and fully recognizing the light of Christ's love for the world. Can anything good come out of us? The answer is "Yes by the grace and power of God." Can anything good come out of a guy named Lowell? Can anything good come out of your life? When that epiphany comes that our power and our love comes from reflecting the love God has for us -- not our efforts but God's love for us -- then, yes, good things come that the world needs. This church can be a place where, whether we agree or disagree, we focus on the love of God. Whether we have disagreement or unification, we are unified in the epiphany that Jesus Christ is for us, for ourselves for our family, for our church, for our community.

I want to add a special message here. I love our Intercessory Prayer Team! I love praying with them on Mondays at 2:30; during the pandemic we do this on the phone. Contact me and I'll give you the phone number so you can join us. We pray for others, yes, but as you pray for others your own life will be touched. One of our dear members was talking about this idea because, to be honest, I feel a burden. There are a lot of pressures in the world right now. She said to me "Christ didn't place your burden there. *Christ's* burden is light; his burden and yoke is easy." If I'm feeling the weight of the world, it's one that I'm placing there. Oh, did I need to hear that! What an epiphany! All this stuff that I'm carrying is not of God or of Christ; this is the stuff that I'm wrestling with. "Cast all your anxiety on Him who cares for you" (1 Peter 5) What a gift of enlightenment! In our proclamation of the Gospel, the light to all nations is for the love of God and Jesus Christ to be for us deeply personal, and together united for the good of our church, community and nation. What an epiphany! Come and see the gift of Jesus Christ for your life. Amen!