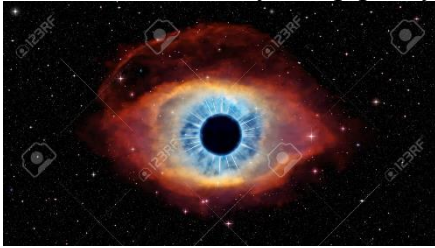


**Sermon for 5 Epiphany Feb. 6 2022 “To See Thee” Stephen Stanley St. Mark’s Fincastle**

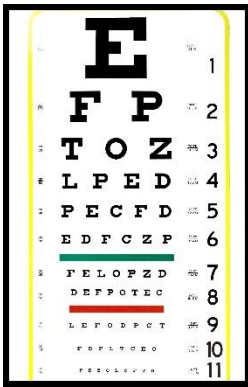
Some say, “Seeing is believing.” Others say, “We walk by faith, not by sight.” Can both be true? The lessons for this 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Epiphany are about “**seeing**” God-Given Visions in our lives. And that is what today’s



Adult Class on Visual Arts was about and that’s what the whole season of Epiphany is about. And that’s what this visual, revival sermon is about, with a little help from Jackie, my own “Vanna White!” Seeing the Gospel God, if

not-face-to-face, seeing God’s Presence, with Gospel Sight, at work, in the cosmos, in the wilderness, on Zoom and in your world. God calls you and me, daily, to join in. It takes Gospel Vision to see and to live that way.

(Eye of God image)

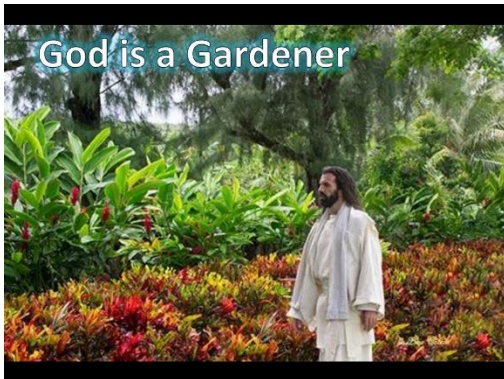


I don’t know about you, but even in person, the old specs don’t work as well as they used to. I don’t see anything with perfect vision, just with corrected vision now. I need one of these (magnifying glass) to read some of the fine print, in my life today. I need one of these (binoculars) to see some beauty in far-off places, in the heavens and on Earth. Our Lessons begin with **corrected vision** today.

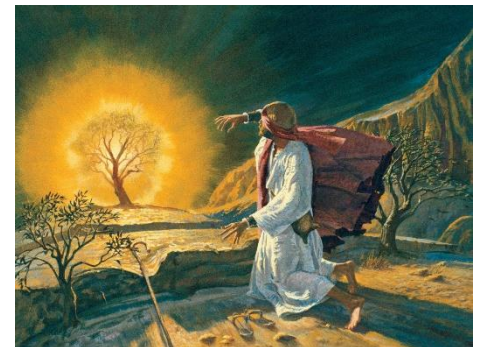


“In the year that King Uzziah died, I **SAW** the Lord on a throne, high and

lifted up.’ If we take our first lesson from Isaiah seriously today, we have to conclude that our Eternal God always wants to show up in person, to be fully present with us, to be seen and heard, to encounter each one of us face-to-face. Is that so? Yes, the Bible tells us so!



From our Gardener God walking in the Garden in the cool of the evening, in Genesis (image), to God,



wrestling with Jacob at the River Jabbok, to God appearing to

Moses in the burning bush.

and following the Hebrews in the wilderness in the cloud and fire, to God with Moses on Sinai, to God calling the prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah personally, to God's ultimately showing up at the River Jordan to bless the Beloved Son, Jesus. To God's power to show up and answer Jesus' prayer "Lazarus, come out!" To God's Gospel Spirit appearing and empower disciples at Pentecost, to the Gospel Son of God, knocking Saul/Paul off his high horse near Damascus, to God lowering a big sheet full of take-out food to Peter, all the way to Revelation, where John sees the very throne room of God and the Lamb upon the throne, among the lampstands, where the crystal living waters flow.

We Gospel preachers call all of this "God-Showing-Up," and we call all these "Seeing the Lord" stories, theophanies, "God Pictures." First, theophanies come to people who are waiting for them, even for a lifetime, like Old Simeon in the Temple and second, to the Magi at Christmas time, as in that wonderful Christmas anthem:

**Said the night wind to the little lamb,  
do you see what I see?  
Way up in the sky, little lamb,  
do you see what I see?  
A star, a star, dancing in the night  
With a tail as big as a kite  
With a tail as big as a kite (image)**



The Magi saw what Isaiah saw, only outdoors, at night, unexpectedly. We too, are called to that vision. Not in the mostly likely place, the Temple, but God, showing up, out in the nighttime, winter countryside of Judea, out in the wildness of nature. We are not just churchly sightseers. We are called to share the vision of those shepherd eyes, who would never be admitted to see the Holy of Holies, high and lifted up inside the Temple, like Isaiah did. But they could see God even more than they, in the face of a child. (Image) And so can we. (Image of Botetourt Music Academy). We find the theophany for Old Simeon in Luke 2, where it has been said, "He [Simeon] was waiting for some eschatological comfort, salvation, and revelation, promised in Isaiah and through all the Hebrew Scriptures. And now the waiting is

over.” What was promised in our first lesson to young Isaiah is finally fulfilled for Old Man Simeon! Which leads him to holler out loud, right in the middle of the Temple:

*“<sup>30</sup> For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel.”*



We are called to that Old Simeon vision too. We dutifully recite, “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all

that is **seen and unseen.**” And yet, we hear our own hesitancy in Isaiah’s “not me,” when God first called. “Woe is me! I am lost,” But then, in the end, “Here am I Lord, send me.” And later Paul would tell his Corinthian brothers and sisters in Corinth, about his own blindness to the Lord and then about the resurrection appearances of the Risen Lord, saying, in our second lesson, from the Message translation: “...that he [Jesus] presented



himself **alive** to Peter, then to his closest followers, and later to more than five hundred of his followers all at the same time, most of them still around (although a few have since died); that he then spent time with James and the rest of those he commissioned to represent him; and that he finally presented himself alive

to *me*. Think of that, the Lord God Almighty, Creator and Ruler of the Universe, presents himself “**alive** to me!” And more, “**Alive** for me!” We are called to live that vision of Christ, alive is us, not in the graven images of a godless world, but in the Gospel images, in the face of Christ!

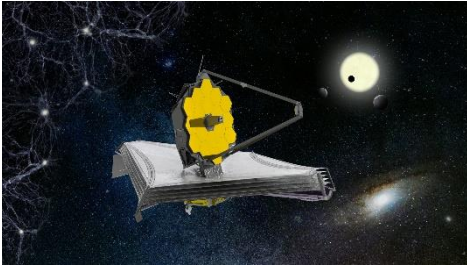
Peter had seen the Lord and yet, like many Saturday night sermon writers, he labored all night, catching



nothing! Suddenly the No-Catch Fisherman is told to put out into the deep again, and is amazed to see and to pull on board his leaky old boat (a symbol of the church) the catch of a lifetime! Peter saw, in his corrected vision, what Isaiah and Simeon in the Temple and the Magi saw, in the Cosmos, in the

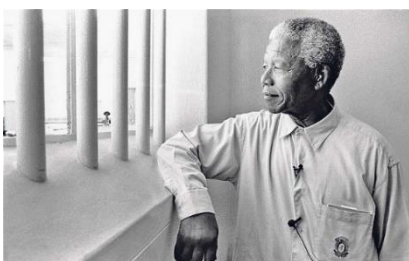


wilderness and in daily life. So Peter sees the Lord, in the context of his daily or in this case nightly work of fishing on the Lake.(Image)



No, the greatest theophany is God showing up, in person, in our daily lives! Can you see the wonders of God’s Creation only through the James Webb telescope or at the end of time? Or is God waiting in the moments of every day, the ones that usually pass you by?” As Thomas Merton said,

“Let us come alive to the splendor that is all around us and see the beauty in ordinary things.” On Monday morning, in the grocery line at Kroger, when we are shoveling snow or working on our tax returns, when the news of Bridgewater College, Ukraine and down the street is bad, and when the weather is good and we walk around the block, with a dog beside us, seeing the beautiful sunshine reflecting so brightly on the fallen snow. When we open the mail. When we get up to make breakfast for those we love. When we call a friend who is grieving. When we hear music or see a painting that chokes us up. When we go up to places like Eagle Rock or paddling down the James River, down to the Food Pantry. When people driving by see the mural of Jesus on the outside wall of the Ministry Center. When we are reunited with people we miss. When we look back and when we look ahead. When we come to the kitchen table as well as to the altar table at St. Mark’s, we have come to see Jesus 2022, because he has come to see us, appearing, knocking at the very doors of our hearts, each and every Sunday, and then, each and every day, from our first breath until our last. Even when we can’t see straight!



In South Africa, where I made a pilgrimage twenty years ago, I visited the maximum-security prison on Robbin Island off the coast of Cape Town. There we were told by our guide, a former prisoner there, that political prisoners, like Nelson Mandela, were denied, even the most basic necessities of life, beds,

decent food, rest, health care, family visits, and even for the Christians Holy Communion form a visiting priest. I stood in awe and held the well-worn bars of Mandela’s cell where he slept on the barren, unforgiving concrete floor for 27 years of hard labor and total deprivation. Heartbreaking, except to hear that Mandela saw the Lord

in that place. Here is a vivid picture of the former prisoner, now President Mandela seeing the Light through his prison bars (image):

Mandela contracted permanent eye damage from the constant sunlit labor on Robben Island and tuberculosis in the clammy cells. Of Apartheid South Africa. It was there, in the worst of places, in the worst of times, that the future President of South Africa knelt on the hard concrete floor, with his fellow prisoners and prayed this prayer called the Anima Christi “Christ Alive,” which you see in your bulletins today. Put a hand on you heart and let us say it together:

***Jesus, may all that is you flow into me. May your body and blood be my food and drink. May your passion and death by my strength and life. Jesus, with you by my side, enough has been given to me. May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross. Let me not run from the love which you offer, but hold me safe from the forces of evil. On each of my dyings shed your light and your love. Keep calling to me until that day comes, when, with your saints, I may praise you forever. Amen.***

The Gospel of Jesus teaches us to correct our vision, from seeing that which is routinely religious, to see that which is really real. Jesus calls us to see, in the yeast, in the fields, in the animals, in the flowers, in the child that is loved, even between the bars, the Kingdom of God, in daily life. Can we see God that way? We are called to that Gospel Vision too. Let Jesus flow. Let Him feed your life. Let His strength be present, in your weakness. Let His Cross Shelter you now. Let us face the evils we face, knowing He keeps us safe, even in times of death. Let Him keep catching people with you and let Him keep calling you from what you have seen, to what He sees in you.

Go for a walk this afternoon, with an eye out for God. Make eye contact with the people whose paths cross yours, consider the lily or the sparrow (or whatever natural beauty you have around you) and what it might be speaking of God’s presence in the world—and with you—in this moment. When you get home, pull out some paper and create in response to what you have seen, heard, smelled, touched, and/or tasted on your walk. “All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for what I have not seen.” said Ralph Waldo Emerson.” Would you find this practice of “finding God in all things” difficult? How might you join the blind man in telling Jesus, “I

want to see” today? What happens when your eyes are opened to the world around you? Where do you see (hear, taste, smell, touch) God in the reality of your life today?

Let the blind man’s prayer be our own, “Lord, I want to see.” And Isaiah’s response be our own, “Here am I, Lord. Send me.” Some must believe in order to see, AND some must see in order to believe. God calls them all. And so, I send you our beloved St. Mark’s, out into a world blinded by blizzards of disbelief and pandemics of disdain of all things holy. Christ calls us to see and seek our Gospel God, in everything: This God sees you, seeks you and sends you out, with Gospel Eyes, called to see the Lord, alive in your life and in the world, and in your daily doings.

*Day by Day. Day by Day. Dear Lord, these three things we pray,  
To see Thee more clearly. To Love Thee More dearly, to follow thee more nearly,  
Day by day by day. (We’re called to that vision, too.)*

AMEN

