

Epiphany:
Shot By Beauty, Wounded By Desire, Called By Love

Grace Episcopal Church
3rd Sunday after Epiphany
Rev. Brian C Justice

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Nehemiah 8.1-3, 5-6, 8-10
Psalm 19
1 Corinthians 12.12-31
Luke 4.14-21

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O God of Beauty, Desire, and Love,
Sustain us as we seek you.
Amen.

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Imagine a moment in your life when your heart was shot by an arrow of beauty.

Perhaps ...

The fragrance of the apple orchard at evening.

The lilting melody of a song.

The finding of a friend in childhood.

The finding of a friend in adulthood.

The air in a grove of live oak trees.

The smell of fresh bread.

The memory of home.

The taste of love.

In Psalm 19, the author has obviously been shot with arrows of beauty and so sings a hymn of praise. First, to the beauty of the Creation. And, second, to the beauty of the laws of the Creator.

1 'The heavens declare the glory of God,

And the firmament shows God's handiwork.

2 One day tells its tale to another,

And one night imparts its knowledge to another...

5 In the deep has God set a pavilion for the sun;
It comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber;
it rejoices like a champion to run its course.

6 It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens
And runs about to the end of it again;
Nothing is hidden from its burning heat.

7 The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent.

8 The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to the eyes...

10 More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,
Sweeter far than honey, even honey in the comb ...

The Psalmist sings of the unending Epiphany of God through beauty. The 'showing forth' of God through beauty.

I would like to suggest that Psalm 19 offers a framework that explains our actual experience of being in the world *and* of living into our Baptismal Covenant.

This Epiphany Psalm shows that we are *shot by beauty, wounded by desire, and called by love.*

First, we are shot by beauty. What is beauty? It is a recognition – but, actually, more than a recognition; it is *an encounter* – in sounds, shapes, colors, words, persons, ideas ... that *stills* our spirit. As if we were shot through the heart with an arrow, we are halted ... we are frozen ... we are arrested in our apprehension of that which is beautiful to us.

Second, we are wounded by desire. The Psalms often speak of desire, of yearning, of crying out, of longing. The encounter with beauty creates in us a desire that is like a wound. And in our deep feeling, in our sweet suffering, we search for the cause of the wound; indeed, we search for The One who wounded us, for The One who *is* beauty. We yearn, we cry out, we long for The One we have glimpsed among the fields where we live and among the people whom we know. This means to say, we desire something that is really greater than the thing *through which the encounter was mediated.* For instance, we are explicitly struck by the beauty

of swans, lullabies, pomegranates – but we know implicitly that we do not seek only more swans, more lullabies, more pomegranates. Indeed, we seek a presence in them and yet beyond them: we seek that which we encountered through the things themselves. In a word, we are shot by the beauty of the Creation; we desire the Creator who is beauty itself.

Third, we are called by love. In our spiritual searching, we find the only way to relieve this glorious wound ... to give ourselves away to The One who wounded us. And we give away, not just our voices or hands, not just our minds or wills, but our hearts. We give away our whole self. And that means we give ourselves to love. After all, it was love *in the disguise of beauty* that shot and wounded us. We give ourselves to the love that has given itself to us.

How? How, in our Episcopalian tradition, do we give ourselves to the love that strikes us, wounds us, calls us, and gives itself to us? We do it, with God's help, by living out our Baptismal Covenant. We continue in the apostle's teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers. We resist evil. We confess our sins. We proclaim the Gospel in our words and actions. We love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. We strive for justice and peace. We respect the dignity of every human being no matter what.

After his baptism in the Jordan and his sojourn in the wilderness, Jesus went into the synagogue and he claimed his public ministry. In the vows of our Baptismal Covenant, we claim ours.

And St Paul, in the letter to the Corinthians, assures us that we all in this together: we are all members of the body and we all need each other. I can't do my part without you; you can't do your part without me.

This is good news! There is beauty in the world. When it strikes us, when it wounds us, when it calls us, let us respond the way Jesus responds. Let us respond the way we promised in our Baptismal Covenant.

So, go.

"Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions ... to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to the LORD ... and the joy of the LORD is your strength."
(Neh 8.10)

Amen.