

Rev. Kimberly B. Glenn

In the name of our one God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

At Christmastime just past, I watched the Sound of Music with my husband Charles. He had not seen the movie for years. I must have seen that movie twenty-five times by now. Not only do I love the story - the thrill of escaping from the Nazi army that was marching into Austria - I love the music. I memorized all the lyrics when I was a little girl. One of those songs rings true to my own life and it's not How Do You Solve A Problem Like Maria! No, it's the song called Something Good. The lyrics say, "somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good."

My childhood was formed and shaped by my family, teachers and friends who I've known, admired and loved along the way. And now here I am, doing what I love to do in a place where I love to be. So, according to the lyrics of the song, I must have done *something* good in my youth or childhood. I must have!

It was growing up in the small town of Lexington, Virginia that shaped me. Living there had its downsides, of sure. We had to drive an hour or more away to buy things of more than average value; eating at a five star restaurant was out of the question (that's not true about Lexington today, thankfully); and there was no where I could go that somebody didn't know me or my parents or my grandparents. I could not be anonymous in that town!

Of course, that is also one of the things I love about Lexington, too. I liked knowing the people who ran the local shops. I liked NOT feeling like a stranger anywhere I went. When I was growing up it felt like we all looked out for each other. Come to think of it, I think that's one of the things I like best about being here at St. John's, too.

Knowing others and being known by others is a basic human need and desire. It gives us comfort to be connected. People generally prefer to exist within a web of relationships. It is scary to most of us to think about being stranded, being completely on one's own. There is safety, it seems, in numbers... as long as those numbers are familiar numbers. That is to say, as long as we know the people with whom we are connected.

Since the invention and, some would say, invasion of the world wide web there is an increasing desire for privacy and security. We *want* to be known, but we don't want to be completely known by everyone. We want some people to know only a very little and some to know more about us and a few special folks to know us completely. We have begun to erect more and more walls around our personal information, with just cause. There are people who do use personal information inappropriately, if not criminally. We now have gated communities and security systems for our houses and our vehicles. We have firewalls for our computers. We protect ourselves so ne'er-do-wells cannot get in.

But no matter how many safeguards and walls we erect, there is one entity always trying to get in; one entity to which we should yield access whether we know this entity or not. That entity, that person, is God; that person is Jesus.

As we hear in today's Psalm, God already knows us; knows us as well or better than we know ourselves. Psalm 139 says, "O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all

my ways.” God knows us because God made us. It’s as if we share something very unique and personal with God.

The problem is that we sometimes don’t recognize God’s presence; we don’t see God because we are not *expecting* to see God. In today’s Gospel Nathanael doesn’t expect to come in contact with the Messiah. In fact he is doubtful that there *is* a Messiah. How could anyone, *any human being alive*, rise to the stature of Moses? Especially someone from a backwoods town like Nazareth. No one there is regarded with such high esteem. There wasn’t even a synagogue there. How could someone as holy as the Messiah rise out of a town like Nazareth?

When Nathanael realized that this man Jesus knew him; knew him as he really was even though they had never met he realized that this man was the one spoken of in the Psalms; the one who had known him in his mother’s womb. This man was, as the scripture quotes Nathanael as saying, “the son of God, the King of Israel.”

That moment was Nathanael’s epiphany. It was a revelation of God’s own self that changed Nathanael forever. That experience transformed his mind and his heart. Epiphanies like that still happen in the world, maybe even everyday. Everyday someone realizes that Christ is real to them; that they have been touched in a very real way by God.

Martin Luther King, Jr. is to be recognized on Monday for his courageous leadership **and**, from my own perspective, his prophetic wisdom. Allow me to share a few words from his book *Stride Toward Freedom*. These are the words Martin Luther King, Jr. used to describe his own personal epiphany:

He said, “I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me, I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward. In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God. With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud.”

King continued, “The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. (I said,)”I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone.”

When King's prays had concluded he said, “At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced God before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: "Stand up for justice, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever." It was about that moment that King said, “Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared (and) I was ready to face anything.¹”

Epiphanies aren't moments that can be dismissed. They are moments that cannot be undone. Epiphanies are realtime realizations that Christ is real and exists right in our midst. These moments change something inside of us forever. They happen when we least expect them, oftentimes when we need them most. God could be trying to break through the security wall we have built up around our identities; the walls that

¹ 1. Martin Luther King Jr, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, 1st edition (Harper & Brothers, 1958), 124–125. From [Jan Schnell Rippentrop](#) commentary on John 1:43-51, 2018, www.workingpreacher.org

may have accidentally walled off our hearts. When we open our hearts to Christ, the good news is that He will settle there. With the nourishment of worship, fellowship and service to others, our hearts and the heart of Christ will beat as one.