

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

JANUARY 28, 2024



## AMAZE

*Sorry folks, Jesus isn't normal*

by Drew Downs

One of the consistent messages in the gospels is that many of the things Jesus says and does amaze people. He doesn't just surprise them or impress them.

Jesus has distinct impacts on people. He will stupefy and horrify at the same time. Because he isn't normal. He defies expectations.

And as much as our own expectations have moved to accommodate the improbable, we

tend to domesticate the amazing, remove the terror, and make him totally normal. Which is sooooo not the point.

What does it mean to be amazed by Jesus today? It doesn't start with prescriptions. But it does require us to be uncomfortable.

Discomfort is often treated like a problem to solve, but it is also necessary for surprise, joy, hope, and especially love.

# EPIPHANY

2024

## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

### **What is the Church?**

This week we will gather after the 10:00 service for our annual meeting. The time in which the congregation does its work all together.

Most of us are used to sitting there, listening to reports about the last year and then electing some vestry members. There's a habitual necessity to it that feels very 20th Century.

But one of the ideas that is foundational to our theology of gathering and being in the world combines the electric sense of being in the now where we are and in calling others to do the work when we aren't together.

This idea goes back to the earliest followers, who saw the church as sort of "in session" whenever they were together. And this sense is mirrored in bishops and laity. So when the bishops got together in the great councils, the church was there. And between that time, wherever two or three are gathered, so was the church.

Today, we model that with General Convention being "The Church" in the formal sense, and then, the rest of the time, we are church where we are. And of the two, which seems more real?

We've put far too much emphasis at the top. And with it, power, finance, and structure. But the church is just as present where and when we gather. Every single time.

With love,  
Drew

# EPIPHANY

2024

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## FOR SUNDAY

*Epiphany 4B*

January 28, 2024

### **Collect**

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

Mark 1:21-28

Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

# EPIPHANY

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## Reflection

We're still in the first chapter of Mark. It may seem like this passage should be halfway through, but it isn't. We're in Jesus's second month after his baptism (with 40 of those days spent in the desert). This is just the beginning.

While the Wedding at Cana described in the gospel of John is famously known as Jesus's first miracle, I might argue that this one is more exciting. Mostly because it challenges *their* expectations of Jesus from the start.

We, on the other hand, are used to water-into-wine Jesus. And really, only a few dozen people were in on that one. This one? Totally public. And more importantly, it is the first clue that Jesus isn't just a rabbi.

As we go through Mark, we will see Jesus keep expanding their minds with more and more divine power. And all of it amazes and scares his followers because it is moving further and further from what they thought it was at the beginning.

And as we come nearer the end of the first month of a year we still think of as "new," we keep getting clues from Jesus that there is more change in the world than we anticipated. And much more to come.

While this may frighten us, it need not frighten us off. For there are awesome things we are called into. But they just might look a little different. Or feel different.

I'm not the same person I was a year ago. Neither are you. And neither is our work in this world. Jesus keeps revealing more. And if we look at it, it might amaze, inspire, frighten, or confound us. But it is really only the beginning.

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