

## Epiphany Sunday Sermon January 3, 2021

*Story: A Quaker once posted a sign on one of the choicest fields of his farm. It stated, "This land will be given to the first truly satisfied person who passes this way".*

*No sooner had he arrived back at his house than a man knocked at his door. "Sir," he said, "I just saw your sign and I want you to know that I am a completely satisfied man. I have a devoted family, a successful business, financial security for the future and I am in excellent health."*

*The old Quaker looked his visitor over very carefully and then said "Pray tell me, friend, if thou art a completely satisfied man, why dost thou want my land?"*

This morning we are in the Epistles. Paul writes seems to try and negate the Jews who insist one must be Jewish first to become a Christian. Paul argues that folks are only made right with God by Jesus' death on the Cross and not by any deeds we can do. Becoming a Jew first is therefore unnecessary. Paul was totally satisfied with knowing Christ fully, "everything is worthless when compared to the priceless gift of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,"

The leveling question this morning for us is: "What counts in my life?" Are you proud because you are born, of what you have achieved or because you fully know Christ? Remember Paul had everything to brag about: his success, his pedigree, his achievement, his credentials, his education. But Paul said, don't look at the past, but look at the future. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Knowing Christ is an ongoing experience. It is about whose we are not who we are. It is about what his call is to us, rather than our agendas and desires. That's the big "ah ha" moment of Epiphany. Here are the Wisemen, incredibly brilliant, wealthy, self-made, but they give up all to seek the Christ, and then to kneel at his feet—the feet of a carpenter's son, a little boy. Paul says, "Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

We are who are -- adopted sons and daughters of God through Christ's free gift – his death on the Cross. Nothing else matters. That is our right. But with rights come responsibilities. We are called to live Christ like lives. We are at the Genesis of working on Core Values, Vision, Mission and Goals. Naming who we are and looking to God for what He wants us to do, and how He wants us to do them. It is exciting work whereas we press on towards the goal, whereas we make plans, for we are told, "People without a plan perish". God asks us to "write the plans down on big tablets and run with them." Next week you will be given a survey that asks you to quickly check items that you know apply to who we are, putting labels of our DNA, defining whose we are and how we were made, and what we were made to do. We will ask for the surveys back in a few weeks so that our Value Team can sort through them and put defining statements with them. It the first step of the Goal Process. Writing down who are as Memorial Lutheran. Core Values do not change usually without great intention. The Team will look at a few Aspirational Values that we will strive to become as we look to fulfilling the call that God has placed on us—the Vision.

This week we celebrate the bright star of Bethlehem who brought the wisemen to their knees, giving them and the world a great hope, promise, and plan for the future. Bask in that Bright Star and the love it radiates, let it fill you with hope beyond your imaginings. Amen.