

Epiphany 7C
St James and Good Shepherd, Laconia, NH
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Hope and the Power of Prayer

We are nearing the end of Epiphany - a season of revelation, a season of light, and a season of hope and love. If you notice, the days are getting longer. I would like to say warmer, but not yet, maybe soon.

Our world seems to be transitioning also. I feel like there is an effort about for everyone to look out for themselves. Whether it's 'America First', canceling of US aid around the world, canceling of entire government departments that often serve the needs of others, and all sorts of other world happenings. It seems to me that some of our hope is fading.

I am here to remind you not to lose hope. That the God of love is still here, that we have power that we forget about, that there are things that we can do – and one of them is to pray. We often underestimate the power of prayer, myself included.

Some of you know the story about my staying here in New Hampshire, but for those that don't, and as a refresher for those that do, I'll re-tell it here. When I first came to Saint James, I said that I would stay for perhaps a couple of years, but then we were moving out to California to be closer to our children. Our children were firmly rooted out there, both living in California for over 10 years. My daughter married a Southern Californian, they had our first grandchild, and they were surrounded by his family and many friends. We decided that moving closer to our children would be our priority. My husband was still working, and he wanted to finish out his career in an orderly fashion, so we estimated that we had a few years still in New Hampshire.

Even so, we started looking at homes in California, choosing where we hoped to live, and we began to get things organized here. I off-handedly joked that I would stay in New Hampshire only if our

children moved closer, but I thought that possibility was miniscule, at best. St James told me that they would pray for our children to move. I laughed and said, 'Good luck'!

Just before we were ready to seriously house-hunt in California, our daughter told us that they were thinking of moving back to the East Coast. Her husband is a big surfer and loves the ocean, so she thought that the Portsmouth area would be best, or maybe Maine. We were very much surprised, but in retrospect maybe I shouldn't have been, because I firmly believe that prayer had something to do with it. Rationally, I didn't see it happening, but there is power in prayer.

This morning, Jesus gives us a road map for how to treat each other. It's not an easy map, in fact, I would say its really hard, especially in our current times. Jesus teaches us to live in this world differently than others; to live in this world embracing love, forgiveness and generosity; to take the love that God so freely bestows upon us and share it with all. This is not an easy task, but it is revolutionary.

Jesus' listeners would have understood that by doing more than was asked, it embarrassed the asker. You see, to give both your garments puts shame on the taker of the garments, because you would be naked. Going above and beyond was not being a doormat, but using the system to shame the asker. Discipleship is not easy. Most of us are not able to forgive with the kind of generosity Jesus asks of us, but it doesn't mean that we shouldn't try.

So how do we start? For me I start small. I strive to love, or at least to see hope in the work of all, especially those I disagree with. I try to be kind to everyone – though I may not always be successful, I continue to work at it. I try to remember to look around, to look outside myself. Who in our community is not cared for? Who is abused or neglected? How can we make choices that benefit all, not just our own self-interest? How can we make choices that help the planet, rather than contribute to the issues that cause environmental harm? How can we see these things as fundamental to our journey as Christians?

I am sorry that I don't have easy answers for you, yet I want to give you some hope. It is only through God's love and grace that we are able to change ourselves and to change the world. It is only through knowing that we are loved abundantly that we can see the world that Jesus sees, that we can

share in the vision. Our personal choices do matter, our congregational choices do matter, even when they seem to be just a drop in the bucket in a challenging world.

So, I call on you as disciples of Jesus to follow the call, to be faithful, to pray, to pray and to pray, because with God's Grace, we never know how it will transform us all.

Amen