

## **Epiphany 2020**

**Text: Matthew 2: 1-12**

**Title: Delight! Encountering Christ in Others**

**Rev. Sharon Smith**

It was 1966 and near a coal mine in the village of Aberfan in South Wales, a slag heap collapsed and engulfed the Pantglas Senior School building, killing 146 people.

The news went far and wide. It reached Buckingham Palace. Queen Elizabeth sent Prince Phillip and Lord Snowdon. She waited 7 days before she travelled to Aberfan to pay her respects.

It was reported around her Jubilee year (and depicted on the Netflix series The Crown!) that Queen Elizabeth has said that her biggest regret in her reign as Queen was not going herself and immediately.

Sourced from:

<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Aberfan%3A+Queen%27s+%27biggest+regret%27.-a082244332>

She is not alone in her regret.

I have moments in my memory where I think – I should've picked up the phone or sent that email, I should've taken time to be with her instead of rushing off, I should've said what was on my heart or I shouldn't have said what was on my heart.

Being alive **is** an invitation to encounter others. People of all shapes and sizes, those who we love to be with and those who bring out something in us, we would rather not deal with. Encounter is both a beautiful and a scary thing. It often asks us for more than we may think we have to offer.

- I think of being with a child age 3 years and I am thrown back (for better or worse) to re encounter my 3 year old self – with all my insecurities and fears.
- I think of listening to someone's joy and I am invited to celebrate with them in spite of my own envy that is stirred.
- I think of being with one who I know is dying – and I am moved to contemplate my own death.

Being alive is an invitation to mutual encounter – bringing our selves, all of who we are, who we are becoming, to another human person.

We will always remain a mystery to one another – hiding something of great value and sacredness from each other. And at times daring to reveal it.

Theologians are bold to say that something of Christ is incarnated (visible, enfleshed) to us by each other. That we are Divine mirrors. Images of God, Imago Dei. That is not to say, we are God. Christ is in us as we are in Christ. And Christ is also so much more than us.

*Richard Rohr, The Universal Christ  
Saint Teresa of Calcutta, Come be my Light  
Ileo Deleo,*

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In this beautiful story held as sacred by the community of Jewish Christians that surrounded Matthew the disciple, we read of wise men, magi, magicians, Zoroastrians, wizards, strangers who were compelled to make a journey to Encounter a young family.

Herod the Great in this telling of the story, serves as the great foil. Some believe that Herod's family were converts to Judaism (originally Edomites), and though he was raised Jewish, his religious commitment was questioned by the Jewish society at the time. Herod enjoyed the backing of Rome and carried out his rule with brutality. He was condemned by the Sanhedrin – the council of the Jewish Second Temple in first century Palestine.

The writer of this story – highlights Herod's fear. And his missed Encounter.

Herod gathers all his chief priests and scribes to find out more about this holy birth. Instead of searching out for himself, he sends the magi on his behalf. While Herod seeks outside advice and send others, the magi make the journey for themselves.

And the invitation to me becomes clear - embark on the journey, however long or difficult. But go, do it. Even when I am tempted to trust others to do it for me.

*Christine Valters Painter, Epiphany Reflection*

For the encounter is not only a one-way transformative event. For who knows how Mary, Joseph and Jesus were impacted by these three strangers. Who knows how the kindness of these strangers moved this young family to extend love beyond their Jewish borders. Who knows how Mary's and later Jesus' understanding was transformed by this encounter?

*Br. Curtis Almquest, SSJE sermon*

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My friends truly encountering others that come across our paths, no matter how briefly, is a spiritual practice. If we are on course, curious seekers of Christ, and God's mysteries, **every Encounter will be delight!** Or in the words from the poetry of Isaiah: your heart shall thrill and rejoice!

God delights in us. Each one of us.

And our common call is to delight in one another – that is to show up, have conversations, build relationships that are mutual – a giving and receiving.

That is to change our lurking suspicion that some lives matter less than other lives.

Father Greg Boyle writes that a sense of delight can be as simple as staring at your friends and family as they eat, anchored in the surest kind of gratitude.

For he says that:

And I think that's where the place of delight is: that I've learned everything of value, really, in the last 25 years, from precisely the people who you think are on the receiving end of my gifts and talent and wisdom — but quite the opposite. It's mutual.

And it's not a place of charity, or giving from a distance (although it may often begin that way) It's a place of mutuality.

Everything this side of death is requesting the honour of your presence – the person right there in front of me. Christ in my midst.

The invitation before us here in North Vancouver:

- Who crosses your path?
- Who are you feeling compelled to visit?
- Where are you being drawn to?
- Who or what is grabbing your attention today or perhaps making you afraid?

Is it the Iranian crisis – we are surrounded by families who are being impacted, where or what are we being called to engage in – a conversation, a hug, a letter, an acknowledgement, a prayer?

Or have you been wondering about a friend at home experiencing social isolation – with the snow falls in this darkest/coldest time of the year – when depression worsens.

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**Follow this guiding star within, encounter, and delight!**