

Revelation and Revolution
Jubilee Mennonite Church
January 4, 2019

Purpose: To explore the mystery of grace shown to us in the coming of God to earth in the form of Christ. Also, to connect the gospel of God being revealed to the revolution that is the kingdom.

Message: As witnesses to God's mystery, we are invited into the revealing of God's revolutionary kingdom.

Texts: Ephesians 3:1-13 (I will read), Mark 1:4-12 [please read]

Synopsis: We have just lived through a year of revolution. The call to re-invent and tear down was heard everywhere. Yet, it is worthy to ask what exactly the revolution that is being proposed was supposed to be. It is easy enough to speak of what is wrong in the world and call for it to be overthrown. Often, those who are disenfranchised seek to be enfranchised, sometimes at the cost of those at the top. Yet this is not true re-construction, just replacing one power with another. God's revolution is one that extends love and grace to all who are part of the same body; bringing everyone under the authority of the new way of being. The revolution is less about dismantling the powers that be then it an acknowledgement of what really is—the revealing that all are part of the same body bound together in love. Paul sees this revolution as part of the mystery in which he was involved. It is the same mystery that we are called to be part of and live in our lives.

^{NRS} **Ephesians 3:1** This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles--
² for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you,
³ and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words,
⁴ a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ.
⁵ In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit:
⁶ that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.
⁷ Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power.
⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ,
⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; ¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,
¹² in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.
¹³ I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.
(Eph 3:1-13 NRS)

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Just when you thought the holidays are over, we have another. Today we celebrate Epiphany whether you knew it or not. For most of us outside the high church and its feast days, the extent of our celebration might have been limited to seeing that there was a short note under the 6th on the calendar of a holiday that we don't know anything about. Epiphany is the celebration of the beginning of Jesus being Jesus; of being revealed for who he was; who he is. Different traditions correlate how Jesus was found out to be who he was in different ways—either the adoration of the three kings from the east or the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan, or some combination of the two. It is meant to remember how Emmanuel was revealed to the world and began to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. It is a celebration of the start of the revolution that is God's way of being in the world, an Canada day if you will, only without the firecrackers (more is the pity).

We seem to live in revolutionary times. As you well know, I tend to be a bit of a news junky. I come by it honestly; some of my earliest memories is sitting with my father to watch the evening news, wondering about the way of the world. Today, it's an odd day that doesn't have me check CBC and a general news feed at least 3 or 4 times a day. Most of what we find there is concerning. Much of what was taken for granted is now being shaken as policy and power are doled out 288 characters at a time in the form of tweets. The way things are is being questioned in ways that we have seldom seen. We are left wondering what might happen next when we open our newspaper or our phones in the morning. These are days of revolution as it seems that everyone (and I mean everyone) seems lost, confused, and not quite sure what they want, spare that they want change, and to be a good deal less confused.

Revolution is when things are turned upside down. When a real, full throated revolution is in effect it is a massively scary thing. People get hurt this way. Revolution is all about the system being turned upside down as the people who begin at the bottom rise up and establish something new. Sometimes it is simply about taking the power that they had long been denied to build a system suited to their particular visions of the world as it ought to be at the expense of any other who might challenge their thinking about it. Turn about is fair play, after all. Remember the Occupy Wall Street protests about 8-9 years ago now. They pointed to the inequities in financial distributions in their slogan that "we are the 99 percent." And it is a great slogan. Because it allows us, the big majority of the We who do not realize most of North America's wealth to identify together that the world is unfair all the while we set a group up for

being responsible for that lack of equity. In its worst incarnation it creates an us versus them mentality, a great theme to get the juices of any revolution flowing. As soon as we can see someone to align with and someone to be against, the games can begin and we can start to dismantle the way things are, and bring the big guys down to size. Until, that is, we widen our view. Then things change. Speaking globally, if you make more than 30 thousand dollars a year, a fairly modest income in North American terms, guess who you are? You are in the top one percent of wealth in the world. And you have to ask yourself if you are really as eager for the revolution to come as you once were. We might well feel differently about this chant if it were echoing in the mequilas of Central America or the other places that make the stuff we buy. If all 0020jjjj''''63 whole lot to be accomplished when you try to go out and change the world, no matter what your politics might be.

Epiphany is the start of a revolution. It is the revealing of God's Messiah, and the world was about to turn, but it is a very different revolution by far. Sure, you have the good guy/bad guy part of the story if you want to read it that way; Jesus and the Pharisees in a cage match until one says uncle. We must call the Jesus way revolutionary because that is what it is. It challenges the old system and constructs something new. But that is not all that it is. Its about revelation as well. Because in addition to challenging what is in the world, Jesus also revealed what it really means to be human along the way. He is changing the rationale of the system in the first place, rewriting it from the very beginning. It is no longer adequate to say that one person has power or doesn't have power because of their position within society. Rather, time and again in the midst of revolution Jesus reveals that it is about more than who is in and who is out, but challenges us to see all as one body, one self that must be together as a whole in order to function. He is saying this about the church; he is saying this about God and the Kingdom of God; he is saying this about the world as a whole. This is the mystery that Paul is talking about to the Ephesians.

I think we often take the whole Jew/Gentile thing a little lightly. To have the early church dare to cross the line that YHWH was about more than just us, the Jews was a BIG deal. It is a revolution of massive proportions. I don't know my hockey history well enough to know what the truly storied rivalries are, but I'll try with the Maple Leafs and the Canadiens—two teams that don't see eye to eye. Ever. And whose identities are mutually exclusive. If I get it wrong, you can translate it for yourselves. In Jesus, and what's more in the Holy Spirits spread

throughout the world, something has been revealed about the nature of humanity; that all people are part of the same whole. And that is why the epiphany revolution is different than any before, and essential for any since. The good news of the gospel is not that those who believe shall inherit power over those who do not. It is not that those who behave shall be given favors that those who do not. It is only that there is a way that has been revealed in Jesus Christ that speaks not only to how things ought to be ordered, but also reveals a far deeper truth; that there are no enemies anymore when we realize that we are part of one body. Be we 99 percent or 1 percent, top or bottom, we are all of the same body, the same blood, the same hope, and the same promise of God's Salvation.

When ever we strike up the call for revolution, the first thing that we due is to sanctify what ever position that we happen to identify with. We put Jesus into the camp of our preferred politic, blessing the outcome that we ourselves chose to bless. Because how could Jesus be Jesus if Jesus doesn't 100 percent back _____ [insert your particular cause here]. And there are few quicker ways to loose friends and anger people then to suggest that maybe; just maybe, its never the simple. I am given to this just as easily as anyone else out there. I want to be right; I want to see my concept of the world succeed. I happen to think that my concept of a good life and that of the Kingdom of God has a lot in common; surprise. But the moment when the revolution of Christ, the Christ changing the world becomes more important than the revelation of Christ—that in Christ there is no longer any enemies, however we might parse them—then I am at risk of making my ideals the idol of my worship, and not God. Does God care happen about what happens to the world? Absolutely; what's more, God has a preferential option for the poor and beaten down—the scriptures tell us this, and Jesus models this. But never at the cost of condemnation of the other. When ever we look to draft Jesus to our side, I think we do well to remember the most important stance Jesus took was on the cross, praying that God forgive those who put him there.

We must remember that true change, true revolution is not about the one percent overthrowing the 99 or the weak overtaking the strong. It can never be only that. Because that is too simple. That story has been told too many times, with far too disastrous results. Revolution, systematic change, has to be more than just change for change's sake. It also must have revelation too; revealing the bigger truth of what it is to be human. There must be an element of

building a body where there is no up and no down, no slave and now free, no male or female, no rich or poor, but a shared sense of the gifts that everyone has to offer to the body as a whole and the community as a whole. We do the work of God, the work of rebuilding the world into something new when we know the faith that underlies all such work. Because without faith we are nothing. Faith that a revolution of values is still possible for us. Faith that the truth revealed in Jesus' life and ministry draws us together, not tears us apart. Faith that the world can change, even when it seems immutable. Faith that underneath all the politicized differences of talking heads and political division used to alienate us and keep us apart, we are all of us one tribe, one people.

There is a revolution of our times. Will we take part, or watch on the sidelines? Will we allow our disenchantment with how things are poison the bigger truths that are revealed to us in the way the Gospel that reveals that God loves all of us? May we pair revolution, what ever brand we may choose, always with revelation that points back to the one who writes and perfects all history forever more.