

**Where is the Messiah?—John 2 1-11**  
*January 16, 2022—2<sup>nd</sup> Epiphany*

*Note: Prior to the reflection the congregation watched Parker Palmer's video, "[Standing in the Tragic Gap](#)" by The Work of the People.*

When was the last time you went to a three-day party? Indoors, probably pre-pandemic. That's what weddings were like in Jesus' time and culture, everything stopped for three days, the wine flowed, and the food just kept coming. I could go into all the nuances and cultural meanings in this faith story but for today I want to get right to the basic meaning of it for the Gospel writer John and for the Church in placing this story in the season of Epiphany. The story ends with the line, "Jesus performed this first of his signs at Cana in Galilee; in this way he revealed his glory, and the disciples believed in him." It's Jesus's first miracle, the revelation of the Messiah. That's the point of the story in John and for the season of Epiphany, "the Messiah has come."

I must tell you though, this year, more so than other years I need to echo the words of Parker Palmer, "The Messiah has come, where is the Messiah?" It's frustrating and infuriating. Even though I preached on Christmas Eve about a God come vulnerable as a baby to show us the power of fragility to turn the world upside down, man I want this Messiah to flex some muscle as this pandemic reveals more and more the gap between the possibilities of a world shaped by love and the reality of a world dominated by fear.

I want the Messiah to make this world a safer, more just place. I want the Messiah to make our politicians learn from past mistakes, to take care of the vulnerable, to set aside political expediency. I want the Messiah to make those in power stop treating people, especially poor, disabled, and racialized people as disposable cogs in the economy. I want the Messiah to save democracy in the United States. Amid my own struggles I want the Messiah to tell me how to minister to families struggling with remote learning, anxiety and depression in parents and children and the stress of assessing risk daily. I want the Messiah to tell me how to minister to so many grieving so much—the loss of connection and relationships, the loss of normalcy, the loss of security and safety.

I want the Messiah to do all this because I am angered by all this, and I am grieving. I want the Messiah to save me from anger and grief. Because I feel trapped, powerless, and exhausted by the daily grind of frustration and heart break. But here we are with a Messiah born an impoverished, colonized, refugee baby who died via state execution, a criminal.

A Messiah who throughout his life found himself in that gap between the possibility of the kingdom of God and the brutal realities of daily life in first century Palestine. Yet, he managed to avoid the traps, as Parker Palmer identifies them, of both cynicism on the one hand and irrelevant idealism on the other. A Messiah who stood in the tragic gap

between possibility and reality waiting for God to break his heart open and show him a way through the tragic gap. The sacred way, the way of compassion, empathy and acceptance, a way that almost always involved opening and expanding his heart to let others in. The Messiah that is revealed to us this epiphany season invites us to stand in that gap, confident in grace, confident that God is there in that gap waiting to show us a way through when we allow our hearts to break open.

So how do we enter that space, how do we stay in that gap, how do we hold the creative tension inherent between possibility and reality while we wait for our hearts to break not apart, but open? Parker Palmer tells us of three practices that help to break our hearts open. First, in a culture where the answer to the question “How are you?” is supposed to be “Just fine” even when we are not, we must learn, as people seeking to find the way of God, to acknowledge and name our suffering honestly and openly to ourselves and to others. This is called “becoming vulnerable”—a hard thing to do in a culture that does not respect the shadow, where even among friends we are at constant risk of someone trying to “fix us,” an act that drives the suffering soul back into hiding no matter how well-intended. We need to find a trustworthy friend or two who knows what it means simply to receive and bear witness to our pain. As we cultivate such relationships, we will find ourselves rewarded with a comforting, “Welcome to the human race.” Second, once we have named and claimed our suffering, we must move directly to the heart of it, allowing ourselves to feel the pain fully, rather than doing what our culture teaches— numbing it with anesthetics, fleeing from it with distractions, or fighting it off by blaming and attacking the external source. The only way to transform suffering into something life-giving is to enter it so deeply that we learn what it has to teach us and come out on the other side. Third, if we are to learn from our suffering, we need to create a micro-climate of quietude around ourselves, allowing the turmoil to settle and an inner quietude to emerge, so “that the God within us” can help us find our way through. Nurtured by silence, we can stop taking our leads from the voices of ego and world and start listening instead to the still, small voice of all that is Holy.<sup>1</sup>

None of this easy, but we can make it easier for each other. We can listen without judgement, we can share our own struggles, we can avoid the temptations to fix and advise. To the extent that we can help create these spaces for each other we will be helping to reveal the Messiah to one another, Emmanuel, God with us in these pandemic times. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Parker Palmer, *The Broken Open Heart: Living with Faith and Hope in the Tragic Gap*, [Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life](https://courage renewal.org/PDFs/PJP-WeavingsArticle-Broken-OpenHeart.pdf). March/April 2009. <https://courage renewal.org/PDFs/PJP-WeavingsArticle-Broken-OpenHeart.pdf>