

## Epiphany II

“I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me, I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward.

In this state of exhaustion, when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God.

With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud.

The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory.

"I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid.

The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand and before them without strength and courage, they too will falter.

I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left.

I've come to the point where I can't face it alone.”

At that moment, I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced God before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying:

"Stand up for justice, stand up for truth; and God will be at your side forever."

Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared.

I was ready to face anything.”<sup>1</sup>

So wrote Martin Luther King, Jr., in his book, *Stride Toward Freedom*, about his struggle to lead the boycott of the segregated buses in Montgomery in 1955 and 1956.

He speaks there of an epiphany, of receiving a revelation of God,

of hearing a call, of knowing,

at the deepest levels of God's presence and power.

Like Moses at Sinai or Peter, James,

and John at the Lord's Transfiguration, or Nathanael in today's lesson,

Dr. King received an awesome gift, the clarity of knowing that God was near.

He referred to the moment as his “Kitchen Epiphany.”

That is telling, for that is the kind of epiphany most of us are likely to get.

Maybe you'll go to the Holy Land on pilgrimage and receive something more dramatic, on the Mount of Olives or at the Western Wall of the Temple.

Maybe you'll go to a renewal conference at Kanuga or Cursillo at Gravatt

and have a mountain-top experience of God's presence.

I don't discount the possibility.

But I am sure you drink coffee at a kitchen table (or juice or tea or water.)

And I am sure you are sometimes afraid, and wonder if you can lead and carry on,

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther King Jr, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, 1st edition (Harper & Brothers, 1958), 124–125.

be it with your small band,  
be it just yourself,  
or with some greater group you are meant to move forward.  
I've known what it is to drink a cup of coffee and hope there is enough strength in it  
to get me through the morning, and I bet you have too.

And so a kitchen epiphany is what most of us need and a more likely place to become deeply  
aware of God's presence and power than just about any.  
You may doubt it can happen, as Nathanael did.  
You heard all the rude things he said, before.  
Can anything good come out of Nazareth?  
Can anything powerful happen, in the kitchen, in Greenwood?  
And when Jesus hailed him as a truth-teller, Nathanael peevisly asked  
"Where did you get to know me?"  
But then he was amazed to hear that Jesus already knew him,  
that Jesus saw him under the fig tree, by supernatural means.  
And then he confessed faith in Jesus in most dramatic terms.

Jesus didn't seem to like that all that much.  
Oh, a little miracle, a bit of divine vision has won you to my cause?  
You will see greater things than these,  
even angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

I wonder how we get there, how we reach that point of seeing greater things?  
Does Jesus mean to whet our appetite and Nathanael's for the most dramatic spectacles of  
God's presence and power?  
Should we search the globe for them?  
Make pilgrimage to reported places of miracle and divine power?

Or does Jesus mean to correct Nathanael's sense of vision;  
to say that these greater things are already at hand?  
That they can be seen with a cultivated vision.  
The reader of the Gospel of John knows this,  
for the chapter just before this is the first,  
with words we have just heard of the incarnate Word, made flesh,  
the one through whom all things were made.  
We also hear there that though the world was made through him,  
the world knew him not,  
that his own people did not recognize him.  
Most people, that first chapter suggests,  
don't see what God is doing before them.  
They don't see the angels.

And perhaps even Nathanael, having come to a first faith,  
was still not seeing all the divine presence and power in Jesus.  
It would take time, focus, prayer.

And with time, focus, and prayer, those who recognize Jesus  
may see his presence and hear his voice throughout the creation he created and has redeemed.  
Kitchen epiphanies,  
shower epiphanies,  
desk and classroom epiphanies;  
all of these are possible for those who learn that by the incarnation,  
God has reclaimed his lost creation.  
Christ is indeed near, in friend and stranger, in poor and needy.  
God does call, to see the world's deep need and live faithful lives  
in Gospel response to those needs, in justice and truth, as Dr. King and those who inspired him  
and worked in the movement did.  
The greater things of which Jesus spoke are happening,  
all too often unnoticed by busy, spiritually-satisfied people like Nathanel.

So, don't give up.  
Look into the bottom of that coffee cup.  
Study the stain on the ceiling,  
Hear the faucet drip.  
Beneath external realities lies the redeeming presence of God, made visible in Jesus Christ.  
Epiphany is all around.