

## ***What Happens in Here Can't Stay in Here*** - Isaiah 60:1-5, Eph 3:1-12

Norwalk Christian Church, January 6, 2019, Lectionary, Epiphany of our Lord, Year C

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Last night Marti and I got back from Las Vegas. If we look a little tired, that's because we are. It was our first real vacation without kids since our honeymoon, 16.5 years ago. And we chose Vegas because, well, it was the cheapest place we could go this time of year. So, we went. And there was so much to see. So much to do. We walked our feet off. And I'd tell you all the details, but you know the saying, right?

What's the Vegas Rule? "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas."

At church camp, our kids learn the Vegas rule in their small groups, and we teach it to them in youth group here as well. In that context, it means that if something personal is shared in the group, it should stay in the group. There are some things you need to talk about, get off your chest, but you don't want it to spread to people whom you may not trust.

But, perhaps without knowing it, churches these days have made the "Vegas Rule" standard practice, but not just for confidential conversations. What happens in here, stays in here, whether it should or not. Don't talk about your faith. Don't talk about the way God is working in your life. Don't tell people about what's happening in our church. Don't share the good news. Religion is personal, and it should be kept hush-hush.

We may not teach the rule explicitly, but we've still learned it. So we don't talk. We don't share. And what happens in here, stays in here.

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Today is January 6th. That may not mean anything special to you, but today is actually a very old Christian holiday, first celebrated in the 4th century, and called "The Feast of the Epiphany."

For early Christians, Epiphany was more important than Christmas. In fact, the season of Christmas was intended for preparation for the Feast of Epiphany. And Christmas was a season, 12 days, in fact, not just one. (That's where that song comes from, by the way.) Which means last night was, officially, the last day of Christmas. (I hope everyone got their Drummers Drumming yesterday.)

It wasn't until the 19th century when Christmas surpassed Epiphany in its celebration, and today we barely know what Epiphany means. But in other parts of the world, it's still celebrated.

In Great Britain, it's known as the Twelfth Night, a night for wassailing, where people would go around to neighbors' homes caroling and wishing people good health. William Shakespeare even wrote a play called *The Twelfth Night*, as a celebration of this holiday.

In Latinx cultures, the day is celebrated as the “*dia de los reyes*” or “Day of the Three Kings.” In Mexico, crowds gather to taste the *Rosca de Reyes* - Kings' bread. In other countries, a Jesus figurine is hidden in the bread. And even in New Orleans, Epiphany kicks off Carnival Season, and the traditional food of the season is “King’s Cake.” You can buy one here at HyVee. It’s like a big cinnamon roll, and it always has a little baby Jesus hidden inside.

In cultures throughout the world, still today, gifts are exchanged on this day, the Epiphany, in honor of the Three Wisemen who shared gifts with the baby Jesus.

But here, well, here, we don’t know about the Epiphany. We don’t talk about the Epiphany. What happens on the twelfth night, stays on the twelfth night.

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The word *epiphany* means “appearance” or “manifestation.” Making something unseen, seen; something unknown, known. The Epiphany of our Lord means our Lord appeared to us—was made known to us. God’s presence was manifested among us. The secret was revealed. The light of God shone forth, and broke through the dark night.

Light is a common symbol for an epiphany. I guess that’s why we associate a light bulb turning on to having a great idea, or an epiphany. Light is shown. What was obscured is now revealed. What was hidden has appeared.

Our text this morning share this theme. We began by reading together Isaiah 60. “*Arise, shine;*” the prophet says, “*for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.*”

And in Ephesians, Paul talks about an epiphany that happen to him, “*the mystery was made known to me by revelation.*”

But there’s something else going on in these texts. The prophet says, “*Arise and shine, for the light has come upon you.*” But then he says, “*3 Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. 4 Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you.*”

The light comes upon you, and then shines from within you, drawing people to you.

And Paul writes to the Ephesians, Christians in the city of Ephesus, about this mystery that was revealed to him, that God, through Christ, is saving the world, and not just the Jews, but the Gentiles--all people. This is the mystery, Paul says. But it’s not a mystery meant to stay quiet.

“*...this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, 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.*”

There's a mystery, Paul says, and I'm telling everyone about it. It may be a secret, but Paul's sharing God's great secret.

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So, I want to propose a new rule today. We can use the Vegas Rule for those things we shouldn't be talking about. But I want us to try on a new rule. Let's call it the Ephesus Rule. And here it is, "What happens in here can't stay in here."

Because we've been given the mystery. In other places it's called the Good News. In your life, it may be called hope or peace. Maybe you call it a "new start". Forgiveness. Answered prayer. Community. Love. Whatever you may call it, it's an Epiphany in your life.

Christ has appeared in your life, and shone the light. You've been changed. You've been transformed. The mystery has been revealed. The light has come upon you.

But you can't keep the light to yourself. You've got to let it shine. You've got to tell others. You've got to take what happens in here, and in here <point to chest>, and take it out there.

So, I have a challenge for you. Let's call it a New Year's Challenge. An Epiphany Challenge.

And it's a simple challenge, two words: *Start Talking*.

Start Talking. Start talking about what God is doing in your life. Start talking about what is happening in your church. Start talking about your hope and your faith and the love you share. Start talking! Reveal the mystery. Tell the secret. Shine the light.

I'm not saying you have to go out and evangelize every person you meet. This isn't about knocking on doors and guilting people into conversion, or yelling at people on the streets of Vegas like we saw yesterday. It is about shining the light of God's love that's inside you.

Post on Facebook. Invite someone to church. Talk about transformation in your life. Tell that story about how you couldn't have made it through without your faith and your Christian community. Talk about what God has done for you. Don't keep the mystery a mystery. Follow the Ephesus Rule, not the Vegas Rule. Tell the secret. Because what happens in here can't stay in here.

Your neighbor needs to know. Your friends need to know. The world needs to know, that Christ has come, and Christ is changing the world.

So, Arise, church, and Shine, for your light has come, and your light must be shared. Amen.