

**Baptism & Illumination** Reading: Mark 1:4-11 Epiphany 1/B 1/7/2024  
By the Rev. Karen Faye Siegfriedt; St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Atascadero CA

*As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."*

Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ: I want to wish each one of you a new year filled with love, happiness, and faithfulness! I also want to remind you as we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord, that you (like Jesus) are also the beloved, a human being created in the image of God. Listen carefully to that voice that whispers softly or declares loudly to each one of us: "You are my Beloved with whom I am well pleased." Because after all, unless we embrace this voice of being loved by God, it can become quite difficult to fulfill our baptismal promises to love one another.

Speaking of this new year, how many of you have made a New Year's Resolution for 2024? Unfortunately, despite the best of intentions of following through, many people struggle to make good on their plans and only 46% succeed. The 10 top resolutions made by most people include the following: Exercise more, lose weight, get organized, learn a new skill or hobby, live life to the fullest, save more money & spend less, quit smoking, spend more time with family and friends, travel more, and read more.

The goals listed above are well and good for our own physical and mental health. But how many of you have ever thought of making a New Year's resolution to improve your spiritual health? As we renew our baptismal promises today, perhaps it is time to make a few changes in your life that will more fully allow the light of Christ to shine through you. What might those changes be? What concrete resolution might you undertake this year to soften your character? How might you seek and serve Christ in all persons by sharing concrete acts of love? How can you actively participate in striving for justice, peace, and the dignity of every human being? These are all worthy resolutions for our consideration in 2024.

Today is the first Sunday after the Epiphany. An epiphany is a revelation, a recognition of the truth, an illumination. To recognize an epiphany requires an open mind, a clean heart, and careful listening. In addition to daily prayer, the reading of Holy Scriptures, and the interpretation of important dreams, I am often illumined by words of wisdom that come my way from folks who choose love over fear. By collecting these words of wisdom over the year, I come closer to the truth on what is required to live a whole and holy life. So as we begin this season of Epiphany, I would like to share some of those words of wisdom that I have collected during 2023. Perhaps these wisdom quotes will illuminate your way too!

### **Healing**

- \*To heal a wound, you need to stop touching it.
- \*If you never heal from what hurt you, you'll bleed on people who didn't cut you.
- \* Being negative only makes a journey more difficult. You may be given a cactus, but you don't have to sit on it.
- \* Maturity is working through your trauma and not using it as a never-ending excuse for poor behavior.
- \* Don't waste your time in anger, regrets, worries, and grudges. Life is too short to be unhappy.
- \* Sometimes you have to let go of the picture of what you thought life would be like and learn to find joy in the story you're living.
- \* Healing is necessary so you can hear what is being said without the filter of your wound.
- \* Look forward with hope, not backward with regret... You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.
- \* Shame dies when stories are told in safe places.
- \* The most influential person in your life is the one you refuse to forgive.
- \* You are not the darkness you endured. You are the light that refused to surrender.

## **Worry/Fear**

- \*Fear does not stop death. It stops life. And worrying does not take away tomorrow's troubles. It takes away today's peace.
- \*Worry is a conversation you have with yourself about things you cannot change. Prayer is a conversation you have with God about things God can change.
- \*If you can't do anything about it then let it go. Don't be a prisoner to things you can't change.
- \*If it is fixable, no need to worry. If it is not fixable, also no need to worry. Dali Lama
- \*Don't worry if people don't like you. Most people are struggling to like themselves.
- \*Don't be afraid of death. Be afraid of an un-lived life.
- \*No amount of regret changes the past. No amount of anxiety changes the future. But any amount of gratitude changes the present.

## **Spiritual Growth:**

- \*The most important spiritual growth doesn't happen when you're meditating or on a yoga mat. It happens in the midst of conflict- when you are frustrated, angry or scared and you're doing the same old thing, and then you suddenly realize that you have a choice to do it differently.
- \*You only need Power when you want to do something Harmful. Otherwise, Love is enough to get everything done.
- \*The greatest need of our time is to clean out the enormous mass of mental and emotional rubbish that clutters our minds. Tomas Merton
- \*People change for two reasons: Either their minds have been opened or their hearts have been broken.
- \* This is how you pray continually- not by offering prayers in words, but by joining yourself to God through your whole way of life, so that your life becomes one continuous and uninterrupted prayer. St. Basil the Great
- \*The biggest communication problem is...we do not listen to understand. We listen to reply.
- \*Forgiveness is the process where we can heal the hurts we don't deserve. Forgiveness is freeing ourselves from a straight-jacket of resentment and rage that destroy relationships and rob us of joy.

## **Grief:**

- \* The hardest part of healing after you have lost someone you love, is to recover the "you" that went away with "them".
- \*The point is not (and will never be) to stop the grief. That is like stopping the ocean. The point is to find ways to swim.
- \*Grief is really just love. It is all the love you want to give but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go.

## **Practical Advice**

- \*Life is like a camera...Focus on what's important. Capture the good times. Develop from the negatives. And if things don't work out, take another shot.
- \*Stop being offended by a Facebook post, by a piece of art, by people displaying affection, or by what someone said to you. Be offended by war, poverty, greed, and injustice.
- \*Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day, saying, "I will try again tomorrow."
- \*Ships don't sink because of the water around them. Ships sink because of the water that gets in them. Don't let what's happening around you get inside you and weigh you down.
- \*The best revenge is none. Heal, move on, and don't become like those who hurt you.
- \*The world you see is created by what you focus on. It is never too late to adjust your lens.
- \*Most people don't really want the truth. They just want constant reassurance that what they believe is the truth.

## **Church/Religion**

- \*The prophetic tasks of the church are to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion, grieve in a society that practices denial, and express hope in a society that lives in despair.
- \*The Church is like a great ship being pounded by the waves of life's different stresses. Our duty is not to abandon ship but to keep her on her course. St. Boniface
- \*The role of a Pastor is not to grow a big church. The Pastor's role is to grow mature disciples who make disciples.
- \*A pastor must have the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child, and the skin of a rhinoceros. Charles Spurgeon.
- \*We desperately need to explore how much of our understanding of the gospel is American and how much is biblical.
- \*Each of us is an innkeeper who decides if there is room for Christ.
- \*Love is never wasted, for its value does not rest upon reciprocity.
- \*If everything around seems dark, look again, you may be the light.

## **Love:**

- \*When given the choice between being right or being kind, choose being kind and you will always be right.
- \*People were created to be loved. Things were created to be used. The reason why the world is in chaos is because things are being loved and people are being used. (Dali Lama)
- \*Always leave people better than you found them. Hug the hurt. Kiss the broken. Befriend the lost.
- \*Do your little bit of good where you are. It's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world. Desmond Tutu
- \*Jesus said: No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. [Jn. 15]

## **Wisdom from a Dog**

- \*There are many secrets of happiness and love that we can learn from a good dog like:
  - When your loved ones come home, always run to greet them.
  - Never pass up the opportunity to go for a joyride.
  - Allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face to be pure ecstasy.
  - Take naps.
  - Stretch before rising.
  - Run, romp, and play daily.
  - Thrive on attention and let people touch you.
  - Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.
  - On warm days, stop to lie on your back on the grass.
  - On hot days, drink lots of water and lie under a shady tree.
  - When you're happy, dance around and wag your entire body.
  - Delight in the simple joy of a long walk.
  - Be faithful.
  - Never pretend to be something you're not.
  - If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it.
  - When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by, and nuzzle them gently.

So Beloved, "let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear." (1 Jn. 4)