

2nd Sunday after Epiphany, Year B
 Jan. 14, 2018
 St. James, Wheat Ridge

By the Rev. Becky Jones

The last time I tried driving in England,
 I lost track
 of the number of accidents
 and near-accidents
 I was involved in.
 Suffice it to say,
 I should have taken out extra insurance on the car.

Driving in England
 is no picnic for Americans.
 It's not JUST that they drive on the left instead of the right,
 though that is part of it.
 It's not JUST that you have to shift gears with your left hand
 instead of your right,
 though that, too, is hard.
 No, for me, the single most daunting challenge
 to driving in England
 is all the roundabouts.
 They're everywhere.

It's true, we have some roundabouts in this country too.
 I've read we have about 250 of them
 just in Colorado.
 But this is kind of a new and
 – dare I say it, unwelcome – development.
 –

When I was first learning to drive,
 no one ever taught me what to do
 at a roundabout or traffic circle.
 I was taught that when you come to an intersection,
 you come to a full stop.
 Oh, how I longed to do that
 at some of those English roundabouts!

What wouldn't I have given
for just a few seconds
to stop and get my bearings
and figure out what to do next?

But no!
You can't stop.
There's no stopping at a roundabout.
Even if you don't know what you're doing
or where you're going,
you're expected to keep moving.
And God help you
if you get stuck on one of the inner rings
of a roundabout with multiple lanes
in heavy traffic.

I had had so many bad experiences at roundabouts,
I was terrified of them.
They loomed in my subconscious,
tangible symbols
of my repeated failures
at English driving.
I just got worse and worse at it,
as my frustration level rose.

On this particular trip,
I was traveling with my English friend Kate,
whom many of you know.
One day, we went to visit Kate's sister.
Turns out, Kate's sister is a driving instructor!
What a godsend!

I confessed to her
that I had no idea what to do at roundabouts
and how much they scared me.
She nodded sympathetically,
then she told me something
that changed my life.
"The secret to roundabouts," she said,
"is lane discipline."

She told me how to choose the proper lane to be in,
and how to get OUT of the roundabout
when the time came.
It's all about lane discipline.

And suddenly, it all made sense.
The next time I came to one of those stupid roundabouts
I just told myself, "*lane discipline.*"
And it worked!
I managed to get into and out of that roundabout
without cutting anybody off.
I had *lane discipline.*
I didn't miss my exit
because I had *lane discipline.*
I didn't wind up stuck in the inner ring,
because I had *lane discipline.*
Discovering *lane discipline*
changed my life that trip.
Lane discipline empowered me.
It became my mantra.

Those moments in life
when we have such flashes of insight,
when things suddenly snap into focus,
are rare,
but they happen.
They happen often enough
that we have names for the phenomena.
I call it my lane discipline moment.
Some call it a "Eureka!" moment.
Some call it an "Aha!" moment.
Some call it an epiphany.
Maybe you, too, have had such moments in your life.

In our Gospel lesson this morning,
something certainly snapped into focus for Nathanael.
But what that was isn't obvious to us.
Even Jesus himself seems taken aback
at Nathanael's sudden
and absolute confession of faith:

“Rabbi, you are the son of God!
You are the king of Israel!”

Jesus teases Nathanael in response.

“Are *you* saying that
just because *I* said I saw you under the fig tree?” Jesus asks.

It’s not obvious to us

how Nathanael was transformed so quickly
from a skeptic

– who wonders whether anything good could come from Nazareth,
who is suspicious of Jesus –
into a spokesman for faith.

Imagine how our president
might have referred to Nazareth
and the people who came from there.

But something happened.

Something inexplicable.

There was something about that fig tree remark
that made everything clear for Nathanael.

It transformed his view of Jesus.

We may not understand *why* the fig tree moment
was such a big deal for Nathanael,
but clearly it was.

What *else* is clear

is that fig tree moments,
lane discipline moments,

Eureka! moments,

Aha! moments,

epiphanies of the Christ,

can come to different people
in drastically different ways.

And when we experience one of the epiphanies,
when Christ *somehow* reveals himself to us,
like Nathanael,
our lives may be transformed.

Tomorrow, we celebrate the birthday
of Dr. Martin Luther King.
There is a famous story about Dr. King,
about an experience he called his “coffee cup moment.”
It’s a story about a time when Dr. King’s commitment
to the Civil Rights movement wavered.
It was the mid-1950s,
and he had reluctantly been drawn into leadership
in the Montgomery bus boycott.
He had endured police harassment,
and venomous phone calls,
and reports of plots to kill him.

Late one night,
after he’d taken yet one more threatening phone call,
and he had a hard time going back to sleep,
he went into his kitchen
and fixed himself a cup of coffee.
As he sat there at his table with his coffee,
he was overwhelmed with a sense of unworthiness.
He was so disheartened
he felt he couldn’t take it any longer,
and he tried to think of a way out
that wouldn’t make him look like a coward.

He prayed the prayer
that many of us have uttered in our darkest nights:
“Lord,” he said,
“I’m down here trying to do what’s right.
But I’m faltering.
I’m losing my courage.
I can’t face it alone anymore.”

And at that moment,
as Dr. King later recalled,
he seemed to hear the voice of Jesus,
answering him.
“Martin,” the voice said,
“stand up for righteousness,
stand up for justice,

and stand up for truth.
And I will be with you,
even unto the end of the world.”

And just like that,
his despair was transformed into courage,
his uncertainty into certainty.
It was, for him, a true Epiphany.
And for the rest of his life,
Dr. King never wavered again.

Maybe there are things in your life
that are causing you fear right now,
that are causing you to waver.
Maybe you're facing things you wish you could avoid.
Maybe there are confusing roundabouts
that no one ever taught you how to navigate.
Maybe what you need is a flash of insight,
a moment of clarity,
an epiphany.

God has whatever you need.
Your Creator has searched you out and knows you.
God knows when you sit down and when you stand up.
Before a word is on your tongue,
God knows it completely.
Our gracious God knows exactly what each of us needs.

God's wisdom is there for us,
if only we have ears to hear.
We just have to listen.
Like Samuel,
we have to invite God to speak to us.
We need to still our yammering minds
and open our hearts
so we can recognize our own fig tree moment,
our own coffee cup moment
when it happens.

Let me invite you
during this season of Epiphany
to commit to a journey of listening
and self-reflection.

Maybe you can keep a journal,
or somehow make note
of how you are changed
when Jesus reveals himself to you.

Jesus first says to his followers,
“Come and see.”
During this season of Epiphany,
you are invited to see Jesus.
You are invited to see God.
And you are invited to truly see yourself.
All of these can be epiphanies.
All of these can be fig tree moments.
Amen.