

Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany, Year A
Feb. 5, 2017
St. James, Wheat Ridge

By the Rev. Becky Jones

Astronomers made the most amazing discovery six years ago.
It's a new planet, officially called Kepler 10-b.
It's orbiting a star in the Draco constellation.
Unofficially, it's being called Vulcan,
a name Star Trek fans will appreciate.

Now the discovery of a new planet in itself is not so newsworthy.
After all, astronomers have discovered hundreds of planets
outside our solar system.
But nearly all of those planets are gigantic, gassy places,
Sort of like Jupiter and NOTHING like earth.

But Kepler 10-B is unique, because it's solid and rocky, like earth.
And it's just a little larger than earth.
Now it almost certainly is NOT inhabited.
It's way too close to the star that it orbits for that.
The temperature on the planet is probably about 2,500 degrees.
But the fact that we found it at all gives scientists hope
That one day we might yet spot a planet
that COULD conceivably support life.

Now, while WHAT astronomers found is astounding
I think what's equally astounding is the WAY they found it.
You see, Kepler 10-B is a very long way away from earth.
It's 560 light years away.
That means it's so far away it takes light 560 years to go the
distance
From that planet to earth.

By contrast, it takes light just 1 ½ seconds to go from the moon to earth,

And it takes about 8 minutes to go from the sun to earth.

That means Kepler 10B is about 36 million times farther away from us than the sun is.

That's a long way off to try and spot a little rock in the darkness of space.

You know how they found it?

They detected it by measuring the minute decrease in light

When the planet passed in front of its star.

Can you picture it?

We're looking at a star 560 light years away

So it's just a tiny pinpoint of light in the sky.

The star is already so faint that we can barely see its light.

And then, this little rocky planet,

just a fraction of the size of the star,

Passes between the star and us.

They say that the decrease

in the amount of light coming from the star

When the planet passes in front of it

Would be like if we had 10,000 light bulbs blazing

And one of them burned out.

One light bulb out of 10,000.

That's hard to wrap our minds around isn't it?

Yet it was that one light bulb's worth of light

That allowed astronomers to discover a whole new world.

One light bulb, out of 10,000, that made all the difference.

It's amazing what one little light bulb

in a dark, dark world can do, isn't it?

Even when it's only one light bulb among 10,000

We can tell when it's not there.

I was thinking about that little light bulb
and that far distant world
as I read today's gospel lesson.
Jesus said "You are the light of the world."

What do you think that means:
You are the light of the world."
The bishop of Colorado once explained to me
that "you" really does mean "you."
Not someone else. You.
Not the person sitting next to you.
Not someone with a better job,
or a better education,
or better health.
You.
Not someone with fewer problems
or someone younger
or someone with more time.
You.
It doesn't get any more specific than that, the bishop said.
You.

"You," Jesus says.
"Just as you are, right here, right now, in this time, in this place,
with whatever you have."
YOU are the light of the world.
The light that this darkened world needs
In order to know itself
and become what God created it to be.

I imagine the disciples responded just as I would respond to that.
With disbelief.
With awe.
Maybe with some protests.

Like all of us do from time to time,
They probably had forgotten just who they really were.
They were, like us, created in the image and likeness of God,
Before the very foundation of this world.
Holy, divine, eternal,
And created for one purpose: to live in love.

The apostle Paul speaks to us of God's wisdom,
Secret and hidden,
which God decreed before the ages for our glory.
Secret and hidden,
just like that little planet
more than 3 quadrillion miles away from us.
"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart
conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him,
these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.
For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God."
Even the depths of the universe.
The spirit seeks out that one little light bulb.

You are the light of the world.
And just like the light from that one lightbulb in 10,000
That made all the difference for astronomers
seeking a new world,
Your light, too, is critical.
It's measurable.
And if it weren't there, it's noticeable.
Without your light, the light of THIS world is diminished.

And so, my friends, shine today!
Choose to shine!
Shining is all about choosing to give ourselves away in love.
Simply offering ourselves, whatever we have,
Freely, generously, willingly.

This is what we were made for.
You are God's beloved child,
and you were made to shine.
And in shining, to bring light into a darkened world.

Just think: If there WERE no darkness,
How would we ever know just how brightly
we are capable of shining?

Amen.