

## **West Hartford United Methodist Church – 24 January 2016**

### **Judges 6:11-32 “Epiphanies – Welcome And Unwelcome” by Pastor Ric Hanse**

#### **You Are Welcome**

Throughout our lives we experience epiphanies. An epiphany is a revealing from God. Some epiphanies we welcome wholeheartedly. But other epiphanies come crashing into our lives and we are not happy to receive them. Sometimes we even try to ignore them or push these unwelcome epiphanies away. Whether welcome or unwelcome, epiphanies are impossible to ignore.

In July of 1990 I received a call from the Reverend Wallace Kirby, asking me to come work for him as his Youth and College Pastor at Louisburg United Methodist Church in the picturesque college town of Louisburg, North Carolina. What a welcome epiphany! Before becoming pastor of Louisburg, Wallace served as the Durham District Superintendent. Prior to that he served as the pastor of Edenton Street – the largest United Methodist Church in the North Carolina Conference. Wallace choosing me to work for him was a welcome epiphany that gave me a thrill beyond belief.

What welcome epiphanies have you experienced and enjoyed in your life? Being accepted into the college or graduate school that you were hoping to attend. The man or woman of your dreams saying “Yes” to your proposal of marriage. Working and working on a challenge and having one of those “aha” moments. Discovering that you got the job you applied for. These are welcome epiphanies. Welcome epiphanies are wonderful.

#### **Gideon’s Welcome Epiphanies**

In 1162 B.C. the Israelites are without a leader. Turning away from the Lord, they choose to worship the Canaanite fertility god Baal and Baal’s female partner Asherah. When the Israelites abandon God, they also reject God’s protecting care. Soon they are attacked by the Midianites who plunder their fields and destroy their homes. Things get so bad that God’s people start living in caves and mountain clefts. One day, while threshing wheat in a wine press to avoid Midianite attention, a young man named Gideon experiences some welcome epiphanies from the Lord.

“Gideon, you are a mighty warrior who will save Israel from the Midianites.” Gideon will be the mighty warrior because the Lord God almighty will be with Gideon to fight the battles and restore Israel. Being a realist and wanting to make sure he is not imagining this, Gideon asks God for another epiphany: God gives Gideon a second welcome epiphany when He burns up Gideon’s offering in a blazing fire. Next God assures Gideon that even though he has been in the presence of the Lord, Gideon will not die. Definitely a welcome epiphany! Welcome epiphanies are those revelations that fill our spirits with a sense of wellbeing, happiness and peace.

#### **Unwelcome Epiphanies**

Were it that we would only experience welcome epiphanies in life. All too well we know that this is not the case. Life is a mix of epiphanies that are welcome and unwelcome. The unwelcome epiphanies we experience range from revelations that are uncomfortably annoying to epiphanies that are heart breaking, frightening and unnerving.

Right after enjoying welcome epiphanies from the Lord, God gives Gideon a revealing that is unwelcome. “Gideon, I want you to demolish your dad’s altar to Baal and then I want you to cut down his Asherah pole. Next I want you build an altar to me.” Filled with fear, Gideon decides to act on

this unwelcome epiphany in the middle of the night while everyone is asleep. Upon discovering the smashed altars, the townspeople fly into a rage. It isn’t long before Gideon is found out. Filled with furor, the people demand Gideon’s death. Thanks to his father’s fast talking, Gideon escapes death.

But this is just the beginning of the unwelcome epiphanies experienced by Gideon. Next, God calls Gideon to lead the Israelites in defeating the Midianites with only three hundred men. As unwelcome as they are, Gideon receives God’s epiphanies and rather than fleeing from them, he does the hard work of accepting and then embracing them. The result is wonderful – God goes with Gideon and together God, Gideon, and the three hundred soldiers defeat the mighty Midianites. Epiphanies can be unwelcome and downright scary. But God always works through them to bring about something good.

Think of the unwelcome epiphanies you have experienced in your life: Discovering that you or someone you love is sick. Receiving bad news about someone you love. Losing your job. Discovering that your marriage is disintegrating. Discovering someone you treasure is no longer living in this world. These are unwelcome revealings. They are painful, difficult and life-changing. And – I promise you – God is working through them. God has not left you.

#### **Welcome To West Hartford**

Nineteen years ago on Saturday 12 April 1997, after an intense interview, it was revealed to me by District Superintendent Dr. Donald Kirkham, that I would be the new pastor of West Hartford United Methodist Church. Waves of happiness washed over and through me when Dr. Kirkham said, “Congratulations Ric! You are the next pastor of West Hartford United Methodist Church.” This was one of my life’s most welcome epiphanies.

Last week I shared an unwelcome epiphany with you. It is time for us to bring our ministry partnership to a close. God through Bishop Middleton, District Superintendent Ken Kieffer and through many messages to my heart has revealed to me that it is time for a change of pastors at West Hartford United Methodist Church. My last Sunday with you shall be 5 June. On 1 July I will serve as pastor of First United Methodist Church, in Meriden Connecticut.

While this is an unwelcome epiphany, it is not outside of God’s plan for any of us. Gideon’s unwelcome epiphany is God’s opportunity to show Gideon, to show the Israelites, to show the Midianites and to show all the world, God’s greatness, God’s power, God’s goodness and God’s ability to transform the dangerous, distressing and disheartening into something beautiful, wonderful and truly delightful.

So now, we will work together to transition our wonderful West Hartford Church Family into a new and exciting chapter. And I promise you that the way we transition our church from my tenure into the tenure of a new pastor will open us to the welcome epiphanies of Jesus’ presence, Jesus’ power and Jesus’ plan for ourselves, for our church and for the world.

Whether welcome or unwelcome Jesus works through all epiphanies to bring about something wonderful. So please receive my unwelcome epiphany with grace, and work with me to welcome your new pastor, whom I know will be the perfect pastor for our absolutely wonderful West Hartford United Methodist Church.