

A Sermon for Robbinsdale United Church of Christ – January 4, 2009  
Epiphany Sunday  
Rev. T. Michael Rock

Scripture Readings:  
Jeremiah 31:4-7 and John 1:1, 10-18

Sermon Title: A New Day Is At Hand

(open with prayer)

Another year has passed, another ball has dropped, another set of resolutions are made and broken again. Sometimes it is hard to believe that anything will change. Christmas happened, the manger story was told and still our world is filled with poverty, disease, hatred, fear and violence. When I begin to contemplate such things I tend to take a deep breath in and sigh. Part of me is disappointed and sad that so many things are still the same. It is usually at this point, the edge of despair that I pray and turn to scripture, not to tell me how to keep my head up high and reassure me that I am heaven bound, but I turn to the Bible so that I may learn and grow from the stories that have been told before of how God acts in the world. I turn to those stories so that I don't stumble into the historical mistakes of selfhood, pride, and languishing despair.

The first story this morning comes from the prophet Jeremiah and is a great song of redemption. In Jeremiah's world the people of Israel are scattered and many are held as prisoners in the northern kingdom of Assyria. One Rabbi describes Jeremiah's words as written on the wind and delivered to every heart. Jeremiah speaks these words as hope from God to the people. God's desire is for the people to come back together. God wants the people to move from despair to hope and from fear to love. The words even make the bold promise of turning mourning into joy. This is the dawning of a new year. The song of the prophet comes to the people every time they dance on the edge of despair. The desire of God is not about salvation as much as it is about forgiveness and reconciliation. The hope of our faith is not about having the right answers. The hope of faith is about living in right relationship. This is the secret to our success as a community of faith. We can disagree with each other all we want. We can argue over different political ideologies or about the Vikings chance to win today, which is slim, as long as we maintain that our single most important reason for being community is that we keep on loving and forgiving one another. This is God's desire for us and it our only hope in spreading light and life in a broken world.

The second story this morning is literally the dawning of a new day. This is the most unique story in all of theological history. It turns the world

upside down. This story is not about humans who become more like God, or about greatness or about anything that is normally lifted up. This story is about taking a step down. God wants to be more like us. God wants to be know about our weakness, our flaws, our doubts, our temptations. God wants to know our fear and our vulnerability and so God becomes human and lives among us. The basic premise of the Gospel of John is that Jesus is God. You may agree with this theology or not, but the Gospel story in this book was that God felt disconnected and desired us to return. In this story, God loves humanity, not the Jews, not the Christians, not the baptized, not the gentiles. God loves all people. God loves the world and sees that it is broken and filled with poverty, disease, war, and hatred. God's hope is to heal those divisions with light and love. A new day is at hand. These stories come to us on this day so that we might know what real change is all about. The calendar may say that new years day was four days ago, but I believe, it is right now. God is going to change us through light and love. We are going to change our world by being light and love.

This Sunday begins the last year of this decade. Something is moving in this community. Our Spirit is growing. Our love is stretching us to take on new things and to no longer live in fear. It is exciting right now to be a part of this community at Robbinsdale United Church of Christ. We have answered God's call to return home and there are bold promises for us. I believe that one of my jobs as your pastor and teacher is to guide us in the process of determining who you want to be and who God is calling you to be. This year, we are going to engage in a spirit-filled and life-giving process that will affirm our commitment to RUCC and challenge us to fulfill God's call for each of our ministries. This process will be grounded in the fundamental idea that God desires us to be together, to love one another, and to forgive one another.

Remember what this story is about. The people lived in a broken world. Most felt alienated, isolated and alone and lived without the hope of ever feeling at home. God asks the people to come home. I want you to remember your own story of homecoming. It may have happened fifty years ago, or may recur week in and week out. At some point you put aside your isolation and loneliness and came home. This is the story that we tell. It is the story of young gay man who realizes he is a child of God, knit together in a perfect way, fully capable of loving and being loved, and he after years of isolation comes home. It is the story of the woman with bouts of depression who doesn't want her friends to see her weak and sad and worn. She draws further and further away until only a thread remains. One day, in the right light, the thread of connection is noticed and she leaves her loneliness and isolation and comes home. She is still sometimes sad, but now she knows that she is never alone. It is the story of the soldier who gets tired of fighting and losing his soul to the enemy. He

realizes that he and the enemy are brothers. He drops his rifle and risks the ridicule of his friends and fellow patriots. He chooses to no longer live in fear and isolation and he comes home. He is broken and bruised, but is also forgiven and loved. He is home. It is the story of the family who spent a year trying to understand death and loss and emptiness. Nothing soothes the pain of that loss. Every time they reach out is another reminder and the separation grows and grows until old friends feel like strangers and the only comfort is something completely new. They realize along this journey that every day provides an opportunity for something new. They realize that pain, loss and change have many faces. They remember God's unbelievable promise of joy. They come home. It's not easy, but here at home there is light and there is love and its OK. It is time to come home.

It is time to embrace this new year and this new day. It is time, right now, to understand that the hope of faith is for all of us to come home to a place of forgiveness and love.

AMEN.