

Let us pray...O Lord, open our hearts to hear Your Word and guide us in sharing this Good News! In your name we ask, Amen. Please be seated.

Good Morning! and Welcome to the Mountain Top - Again!

If today's Gospel sounds familiar, it is. In our liturgical calendar, every year, for the Last Sunday in Epiphany, along with Peter, James, and John, we experience the Transfiguration of our Lord. And with each reading of this transformation, I have come to learn and realize a new nugget, a new understanding of the magnitude of this event that I had not heard before. Perhaps it's God's way of helping me to truly find a place of "Holy Listening".

An account of the Transfiguration is found in each of the Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke (*Mt. 17:1-9; Mk. 9:2-10*); but Luke is the only one where this event begins in the context of prayer (*9:28*). As we ascend the mountain in Luke's Gospel, we find the transformation begins while Jesus is praying, when "*the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white*". Now...through the eyes of the first 3 apostles, we too are witnessing the magnificent glory of Jesus and what has been called the "transcendence of the holy".

While observing this radiance, the 3 saw that Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. Again, Luke's Gospel is the only writing in which we hear the context of the conversation. The passage shares that Moses and Elijah were talking with Jesus about his "exodus" to Jerusalem. As one theologian states: "*Jesus' death would be the exodus from the bondage of sin in the world*". We can also learn that in this case, exodus is not about leaving from a place but is also about journeying to a place. For Jesus this means, his ministry, his death, and his resurrection in glory. To us the appearance of Moses and Elijah in radiant glory can mean that they now bear witness to Jesus as the one who fulfills and now will surpass their roles. For Moses, it is the Law-the Old Covenant and for Elijah, the Prophets. Jesus, then, is the Chosen One, the New Covenant...the Savior securing our future from sin.

Of course, our dear apostle Peter, offers to build a dwelling to commemorate the glory of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. Now, to provide some context here, it is helpful to understand that in the Jewish tradition the building of temporary shelters

occurs as a type of cultural pilgrimage and a way of honoring special people and times. Such temporary shelters would be similar to those constructed at the harvest Feast of Booths, also known as Sukkot. This Jewish Feast of Tabernacles is an important occasion in the cultural and spiritual understanding so it is reasonable to understand why this might be the first thing Peter thinks of and blurts out.

As the cloud overshadows them, God is now manifest, and they hear the voice say, *"This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him!"*. After the voice has spoken, Jesus is now alone, and the Apostles, as is stated in verse 36 *"kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen"* (v. 36). Some theologians point out that their silence is in keeping with Jesus' warning not to reveal his identity (9:21), as well as the profound mystery and awe of this experience. It was not until they experience the events surrounding the Resurrection that Peter, James, and John could begin to understand what they had witnessed on the mountain and then could make known this story and share the message for us to learn.

I'm sure some of this story of the radiance surrounding the transformation reminds us of Moses' experience as well. So, as we return to the time of Moses, when he descended from the mountain, there was a veil over his face. No one could see the radiance that shone there. Yet, now as Jesus descends with the 3 apostles, there is no veil...his glory surrounds him and as we read in Paul's epistle this morning, especially in chapter 3 (3:15 – 18) that...*"whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit."*(writes Paul)

Jesus knows what awaits him, glory for the healing, but then the betrayal, the death, and through this, the glory of the resurrection to our "Easter Jesus"! In our tradition, we are Easter People, and in spite of the swirling eddies – these whirlpools of seemingly discouraging events, we rise above these things through our faith and our hope and our love! We have seen the light of Christ and we have glorified the transfigured Lord and as Apostle Paul reminds us, our veil is lifted... we know the freedom...we have it in us to share the Good News!

Taken together, the Gospel passage and Paul's writings are powerful guides for us. For as Jesus descends from the mountain, the true work now begins. This will be the difficult part of the ministry, bringing us into the light of the Word and opening our eyes to injustice and hurt, while opening our hearts to the ways of Jesus, to being courageous and speaking as an advocate, to bring healing, compassion and peace. It is not easy and is a dangerous journey on which we all travel.

As followers of Jesus, we risk persecution, ridicule, and ostracism from those around us. Embracing this movement means that we are part of the party with Jesus, coming down from the mountain. It means that with Peter, James, and John we too are transformed by this experience of feeling and knowing God's glory in Jesus, our Savior. **We...have...been...called...**now how do we enter into Jerusalem with Jesus? For today, perhaps we need to think on entering Jerusalem as entering into our present-day reality...

Jesus brings us into new life, and it is because of our faith that we know we have eternal life. We need this assurance of our life in Christ as we leave the safety of this mountain. Not unlike issues in Jesus' time, we are facing realities of pandemics, wars, attacks on the most vulnerable, and economic instability. As we travel down the mountainside and stand together, maybe not always fully understanding, how can we use our experience of our own transformation to impact those around us and our communities? We do know our actions will make a difference...but what can we realistically do? And how can we imagine our response?

What if we were to take just a moment as we reflect on this divine transformation - can we think on a time when we have been the participant in an encounter with someone who was so dazzling that it transformed us, and we come away feeling like a different person afterward? What **was** that experience? In this new us, how **does it change us**? How do we now live and continue our journey of faith and love?

Just this week, the Episcopal Church through the voice of the President of the House of Deputies, Gay Clark Jennings, issued a statement and urged others to speak out and take action against the situation in Texas regarding trans children. The Texas Governor, in a power position, issued a statement that certain medical treatments for transgender minors, constitute child abuse and that there will be a

legal requirement to report it and legal action would be taken. This attack on a most vulnerable population, is against not only our baptismal covenant, but also puts youth, their families, and the medical professionals treating, them at risk. President Jennings and others warn that such policies effectively criminalize transgender youths and their families and increase their risk of depression and suicide.

The concern is that there is serious legislation being considered in other states, Arizona included, that continues to move in a negative direction. As members of the Jesus Movement and in our Episcopal tradition, President Jennings reminded us that our faith tradition has supported legal protections for gay and lesbian citizens since 1976, and have extended our opposition to discrimination based on gender identity in a 2009 resolution. Here in Arizona, we can follow up with our legislators, we can conduct civic academies, we can support organizations advocating for our youth. We need to remember that as we continue to renew our baptismal vows, we emphatically state that we will **respect the dignity of every human being**.

There are many opportunities for us to be the advocates, we can also continue to follow Jesus in prayer. As a first step, during our prayers of the people today, we can pray for the children in Texas. We can also pray for the people of Ukraine for strength and courage. We can pray that intervention and realization can occur for those again in a position of power, to examine their actions and to turn from further power plays. We can pray for peace.

We were never promised that it would be easy to be a follower of Jesus. Now, as this Last Sunday of Epiphany becomes our bridge into the penitential and reflective time of Lent, we have it within us to share the light of Christ. Our hopes and our faith and our love make it possible for us to find a **nugget**, a new message we didn't hear before that becomes our living into our hope, living into our faith, living into our love, and sharing the Good News of Christ! Now, as we are transformed, let us share together in the journey down the mountain for our new life in Christ and find ourselves standing in community as we face our "Jerusalem realities"... We ask God's blessing as together we journey.

Amen.
