

Last Sunday after the Epiphany - A (2026)

Exodus 24:12-18

Psalm 2

2 Peter 1:16-21

Matthew 17:1-9

‘While he (Peter) was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

February is the traditional month in the Diocese of Spokane when the parochial clergy gather for retreat. Priests and deacons from throughout the diocese gather to worship, engage in small-group discussions, enjoy plenty of ‘free time’ to nap, read, hike, get a massage, and spend an hour with a person specifically trained in spiritual direction. I have attended many of these gatherings, and the one a year ago was by far the most relaxing and edifying.

The scripture passage we used in all our worship times was taken from the opening chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, in which Paul prays that the church will gain deep insight into the Lord’s powerful working and rich gifts in Christ. Specifically, he prays that God will give the people “minds ready to receive wisdom and revelations so they will truly know you. Open the eyes of their hearts, and let the light of your truth flood in.” “Open the eyes of their hearts.” It became for me like the lyrics to a song I couldn’t get out of my head, especially so given today’s epiphany of the Transfiguration of Jesus from Matthew’s gospel. ‘Open the eyes of their hearts’ means we ‘see’ and comprehend with our entire being, not just with our physical eyesight. These intense encounters with the divine may only last a moment, but they are transformative and ‘real’ in the truest sense of the word.

All three synoptic gospels contain in detail this culminating event of the Epiphany season. The other three occasions of divine revelation we celebrate during this season are the arrival of the Magi to worship the infant king, the baptism of Jesus

by John in the River Jordan, and the miracle of water becoming wine at the wedding at Cana. Today's revelation of Jesus' full glory shining brighter than the sun on the mountain involved the 'inner circle' of disciples Peter, James, and John, and the prophets Moses and Elijah. These manifestations of the sovereignty and authority of Jesus as the Son of God affirm him as the Light of the World who has appeared in the flesh amidst the darkness of the world in order to illumine the lives of all nations, both Jews and Gentiles, bringing forgiveness of sins and salvation to all peoples.

I think we probably know today's story rather well. Jesus takes Peter, James, and his brother John, and leads them up a high mountain for them to be by themselves. Upon arriving, Jesus was transfigured before them, his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Moses and Elijah join Jesus in conversation while Peter, being Peter, tries to figure out something to say or do in response to this unnerving event. He awkwardly suggests that tents be built for Jesus and the two prophets. I can see in my mind's eye Peter stammering and stuttering incoherently because the verse continues with "*while he was still speaking*, a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.'" As I suspect any of us would do, the three disciples fell on their faces in fear and terror. Jesus touched them and told them to get up and not be afraid. The disciples look up to find only Jesus remaining on the scene.

I think this is what it is like to see with the 'eyes of one's heart.' The three disciples didn't just see Jesus and the two prophets, they 'experienced' with their total being this revelation of the divine reality that is Jesus. The transfiguration of Jesus was the climax of his ministry to date, which would have a lasting impact on the disciples, an experience that they could not have created for themselves, but one in which Jesus took the initiative to more fully prepare them for the journey of faith that lay ahead of them.

We cannot create these experiences; we encounter them when we see with 'the eyes of our hearts.' We encounter them when we truly learn to love God and neighbor; when we acknowledge and embrace that the last shall be first and the first last; when listening for the voice of God over the clamor of the raging voices of this world; when we put down our priorities and pick up our cross as we follow

the will of God; and when we become transfigured by the love, power, presence, compassion, promises, peace, joy, and hope of God.

An aspect of these encounters is that they can happen all around us, in the ordinary and sometimes insignificant aspects of our lives. Transfiguring encounters are not restricted to mountain-top experiences, which we so love and desire to retain. These encounters with the divine change us from who we are to whom we are becoming. They reorient everything in our lives. They become moments of indescribable grace. They are moments in which we experience a deep union with God. They come unexpectedly and reveal the realities when earth and heaven, time and eternity, and the divine and humanity intersect. They are the ‘thin places’ that give us glimpses into true wholeness and shalom. They become experiences we cannot unexperience; we cannot unsee that which we have seen with the ‘eyes of our hearts.’ They help shape in us the desire and ability to live into our new and transformed lives ‘down in the valley’ of daily living, in places and with people God has called us.

Because these encounters change us, we might find ourselves fearful or question the unknown these changes are bringing forth in our lives. Following the unimaginable demonstration of divine glory, the disciples respond with fear and terror. But Jesus offered them encouraging words to get up and not to be afraid. The Greek word used for ‘get up’ is ‘raised.’ So a more literal translation would read, ‘rise and do not be afraid.’ We ‘rise’ with Christ out of the waters of baptism, and we will ‘rise’ on the day of resurrection. “Do not fear” is more than words; Jesus utters it numerous times in the New Testament. They are an assurance that we are never alone and that he stands always at the ready to walk with us through the ups and downs that we will no doubt experience in our newly transformed lives if we will trust him.

Peter, James, and John came down from that mountain as transfigured followers of the Messiah, committed to the journey of faith that would take them from the shouts of “Hosanna” to the taunts of “Crucify him,” to the cross outside the city gates, and ultimately to an upper room filled with despondent followers with whom the resurrected Jesus reconnects with the consoling words of “Peace be with you.”

Dear friends, we begin our spiritual time of reflection and repentance as the season of Lent unfolds for us. We will be challenged to take stock of our lives in light of the cross and to prepare for the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension for the sake of you, me, and the whole of creation. I pray that we will take the time and be willing to see what God has in store for us as we take up Paul's prayer for "minds ready to receive wisdom and revelation so that we will truly come to know God...that the eyes of our hearts will let the light of God's truth to flood in...that we will see the full extent of God's power that is at work in those of us who believe...." So let us stop, look, and listen for the voice of Jesus, being not afraid of what we will encounter during this wilderness journey, either about ourselves or what God might be placing on our hearts. I cannot think of a better way to prepare for the joy of Easter.