

## SERMON for Last Sunday after Epiphany – February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

Readings: Exodus 24: 12-18; Psalm 2; 2 Peter 1: 16-21; Matthew 17: 1-9.

Goodness! Where has the year gone to?!

We are on the last Sunday of Epiphany already and next week we begin our journey through Lent.

Epiphany is the season of revelation, hopefully a time of understanding our faith, understanding who God is in Jesus, a little deeper.

Epiphany of course began with the visit of the Magi – of the scholars, from the east, who followed a star, expecting it to lead them to a great king, someone of earth-shattering significance. Our Christmas cards and traditions tell us they found a baby in a manger, but it was more likely a toddler of a handful of years, living with his working class parents in a modest house. A great king in the guise of an innocent, vulnerable child in extremely humble surrounds.

Over the last few weeks, two things have been particularly significant for me.

First, the prophet Micah's echo of last week's reading from Deuteronomy: "What does the Lord require of you?"

Micah's response: 'to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God' [Michah 6: 8b] compared to Deuteronomy's: 'to fear the Lord, walk in all his ways, to love him and to serve the Lord with all your heart and with your soul and to keep his commandments'. [Deut 10: 12b-13a]

Second, is Jesus' call of a few weeks ago to be 'the salt of the earth and light of the world' [Matthew 5: 13-14]

On this last Sunday of Epiphany, we have the story of the Transfiguration.

In what we call the Synoptic Gospels, (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), the Transfiguration story is at the mid-point of the gospel story. It, and Peter's confession which precedes it, are the hinge, if you like, on which the gospel story turns.

That turn is toward Jerusalem, toward what awaits Jesus and the disciples there. Up until this point in Matthew's gospel, the focus has been on the birth stories, introducing John the Baptist, and the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and then the primary focus has been on Jesus' teaching and ministry. So perhaps this story, which shows Jesus suddenly transformed in his exalted being, is meant to ready us for the cross and what lies beyond it.

In the liturgical year that's been developed by the Church over the centuries this story also serves as a hinge. With Transfiguration Sunday, we move from the season of Epiphany, and the revealing of Christ to the world, into Lent and the journey to the Cross, with the focus put back on us, our journey, deepening our faith through reflection and penitence.

Let's look at the gospel passage, and what do we make of it, this transfiguration? One moment it's Jesus and his inner circle, Peter and James and John, walking up a mountain. Then suddenly the light changes, and Moses and Elijah join, talking with Jesus. Perhaps Moses and Elijah represent the Law and the Prophets -- in other words, the word of God known in Jesus' day (our "Old Testament").

The lectionary includes another story of a divine encounter on a mountain top. Our first reading from Exodus tells of Moses' receiving the stone tablets of the Law from God on the mountain. When Moses had been in God's presence, his face would shine just as Jesus' face shone on the Mount of Transfiguration. This is a device of the writer of Matthew's gospel to demonstrate that Jesus is not only walking in the tradition of Moses,<sup>2</sup> but that Jesus is greater than Moses.

The three disciples who witness this are understandably terrified. Peter suggests building a memorial of three buildings. But he is interrupted by a heavenly voice, the same voice that was heard at Jesus' baptism: "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." This time the voice, now speaking to the three disciples, says: "Listen to him!"

"Listen to him!" Think of your mother saying in a loud voice, "Listen to me!" God doesn't want them to be passive witnesses, God wants them to *listen* to and follow Jesus to the very end.

And then it's all gone. The fear and trembling of the disciples is replaced by Jesus' gentle touch and his word, "Get up and do not be afraid."

As we make the turn toward Lent, I want us to focus on the mandate of the heavenly voice: "Listen to him!" How do we do that?<sup>1</sup>

I love to go into Lent with that one my heart – Listen to Him!

I reflect on the deeper meaning behind the Deuteronomy and Micah question: "And what does the Lord require of you"; I pick up Jesus' encouragement to his disciples to be salt of the earth, a light to the world.

The light Moses saw and reflected, the light which Peter, James and John were enveloped in on that mountain, the light of Christ – light of the world, which, like a baton being passed on to us, we are called to be.

Which are the words of Jesus you listen to? Which will carry you through Lent to Easter and beyond? Which will transform you in the next days, weeks, months, years of your life?

It used to be the tradition to give something up for Lent. Certainly, when I was at school, in different years, I gave up sugar in my tea, milk in my tea, chocolate and other lollies. In more recent years, friends have given up a wide range of things, from alcohol, to meat, to Facebook.

Nowadays, we are more often encouraged to take something up, do something positive for Lent – be more conscientious about saying our prayers or reading the Bible daily. Perhaps we can be encouraged read a devotional book or join a Lenten Study group.

One rather radical suggestion I came across was to do nothing .... !

Do nothing but do it intentionally – create a space for God in your life. You might like to go for a walk, sit and look at your garden or some peaceful scene. You don't need to listen to some music, a podcast, the TV. You can give yourself some space from the phone, or computer, email or social media. Do nothing, for a period of time each day and be intentional about reserving that time for God. Remember in the book of Kings, Elijah expects to hear the voice of God in the wind, in an earthquake, in a fire, but instead, hears God in a small voice, in the silence. So, for a period of time each day, turn off the external noise, do nothing except "Listen to Him".<sup>2</sup>

Whatever we make our Lenten discipline this year, I pray that you will at least attempt something different in your daily life – whether it is giving something up or taking something on, the important thing is: "Listen to him!" Amen.

Revd Sally Buckley  
19 February 2023

#### REFERENCES:

1. based on a blog essay by Rev Ron McCreary found at: <http://readysunday.blogspot.com> in 2008.
2. Jake Braithwaite, SJ. *A not-so-radical proposal for your Lenten Season: Do nothing*; The Jesuit Post, published February 19, 2020.