

Last Sunday after Epiphany
Year B

2 Kings 2:1-12
Psalm 50:1-6
2 Corinthians 4:3-6
Mark 9:2-9

The Gospel reading is very familiar to most Christians. You could probably recite most of it along with me as I read it. As with so many portions of scripture, this familiarity makes it difficult to really examine what is happening and what God's message to us might be. That is the joy of the scriptures - discovering time and again the truths behind the story. And each time we approach the story, we may see different details as our own situations change. Such is the case with this reading - we can hear something new every time we approach it.

This reading comes right in the middle of Mark's Gospel. It is the halfway point and, for many, the turning point in Jesus' ministry. We are midway between the baptism and the resurrection of Jesus and both of those events are mirrored in this story. But, on the grander scale, this story plants us in the middle of the core of Jewish faith.

We could spend hours discussing the symbolism included in the telling of this event - why were Moses and Elijah present, why did Jesus take these three disciples with Him as He went up the mountain, what is the significance of the dazzling white garments? All of these are legitimate questions, but they might distract us from the message we are to take from today's reading.

As we compare this event with Jesus' baptism, the first point to note is the baptism was focused on Jesus. The voice from heaven stated "You are the Beloved" and all of the action was directed to Jesus. In this story, everything is in the third person plural - "This is the Beloved. Listen to him." While these three disciples have been with Jesus for a while and have experienced many unbelievable miracles, they still have trouble understanding the significance of all they have experienced. In the preceding chapter, Peter has expressed the opinion of all that Jesus is the Messiah. But, he also rebukes Jesus when this man he has just said is the Messiah begins to talk about the suffering that must take place. Now, the voice from heaven is telling the disciples to really listen to what Jesus is saying - the good stuff and the terrifying stuff equally.

As they were leaving the mountain top, Jesus instructs them to keep silent about all they experienced until a later time. It was now time to get back into the thick of ministry. Why would He say that? I believe this is the message for those who were to come after, those who had not experienced, firsthand, the ministry of Jesus - us. The other disciples and the crowds were not ready to hear this story and we can only comprehend it through our belief in the resurrection of Jesus. That is why all of this symbolism is placed in the story. Looking back, we can remember that neither Moses nor Elijah were believed to have died, but were caught up into heaven. We can remember all of the times when momentous events happened on mountaintops. We can relate the dazzling white garments of Jesus in this story with the apparel of the angelic beings who announced the resurrection to the women. And, we can relate to the terror the disciples experienced on this mountain.

We might never experience the overshadowing cloud with the voice proclaiming we are God's chosen, but we do experience the awe that we feel when we realize that God has acted in our midst. Like the disciples, we might not know how to explain what we experienced, but we know that God will help us relate our story when the time is right - when someone needs to hear that God is still active in our world.

Over the next six weeks, we will have time to focus our attention on all God has done for us. We may reflect on how God has called this community of believers into existence and given us the compassion to feed those who come to us and to pray for the many needs we share. Each of us will be given the opportunity to have our own transfiguration event as we are challenged to really listen to what Jesus is trying to tell us. God has a plan for us - we know that. As we collectively listen to the voice of God within our hearts, we will be strengthened for that ministry and the fire within us will be rekindled because we know God is using us to continue the ministry of Jesus in this location. We are taking our part in the work that is happening world-wide. We are being transfigured into the heart of God.