

Last Sunday after Epiphany
Year A

Exodus 24:12-18

Psalm 2

2 Peter 1:16-21

Matthew 17:1-9

It seems like nothing changes in the church. Across the centuries, when confronted with something new or unexpected, the church seems to react the same way. We see it in the gospel reading today. What is that action the church appears to do?

On the mountain top, Peter, James, and John have been privileged to witness an extraordinary event. They have seen Jesus glow from within with a light that is brighter than the sun. They have witnessed Him speaking to Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest heroes of the Israelite nation. How do they react? Peter does what we might expect him to do. He has a plan and speaks up.

Like the church throughout history, when confronted with this new experience, Peter wants to build. In this case, Peter wants to build shelters for Jesus and these two heroes of the past. Today, the church might want to start a new program or appoint a committee to investigate the potential outcomes of such a program. Peter just wants to get to work and do something – anything.

God has a better plan. Perhaps, unlike Peter, we should wait for God. In this case, God tells the disciples to stop acting and to listen, to obey Jesus. Too often in our prayer life, and I am as guilty of this as anyone, we go to God with our laundry list of needs. We run through our list and say a quick word of thanks, and then are off to the next thing on our to-do list for the day. We don't spend time waiting on God and listening for what God might have to say.

After God had spoken, Jesus acted. He did three things. First, Jesus touched the disciples. He leaned over, for they had fallen prostrate on the ground, and touched them on the shoulder. According to psychologists, the touch of the human hand can have a powerful calming effect on us. Just the simple act of laying our hand on someone's shoulder when they are in distress means a lot to them.

Next, Jesus told the disciples to get up and to not be afraid. He tried to calm them, not only with His touch, but with His words. We can only imagine what was racing through the minds of these three men. Not only had they seen Jesus glow, but they had seen Moses and Elijah appear talking with Jesus. If that was not enough, God had spoken to them. I think fear might have been an understatement.

Perhaps the most intriguing part of this entire episode was the final word Jesus had to say. As they were walking back down the mountain, reentering the world, Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they had seen and experienced until after He had been raised from the dead. Yes, Jesus had told them about what He was facing when they got to Jerusalem. Yes, He had explained that He must be put to death, but that He would be raised. However, the disciples still

didn't understand what it really meant. They had a lot to learn in the next few weeks as they continued to follow Jesus.

We also have a lot to still learn as we follow Him. Although we know what the Bible tells about the life and ministry of Jesus, and we believe that He did die, but was raised from the dead, we still have a long way to go in understanding how Jesus is still active in this world and in our lives. We try to believe, but it is difficult. Like Peter, we try to anticipate what God wants from us, but we often come up short.

Following Jesus has never been easy. He warned the disciples that they would face many trials and persecution. While we may not face the same trials and persecutions they faced, we still have the same problems of living up to our own expectations. Just a few days before this incredible experience the disciples had on the mountain, Peter had both exclaimed that Jesus was the Son of the living God and had been rebuked by Jesus for denying that Jesus had to suffer. We are more similar to Peter than we might want to think. While we confess that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, we also have trouble accepting all that is before us.

I thank God daily that God can see passed my shortcomings and still use me in the work I have been called to do. I also thank God for each of you and that God looks passed all our faults and uses us in so many ways. While my constant prayer is that I am not worthy of all God does in my life, I praise God that we all can follow God's command to listen to Jesus, that we can feel the touch of Jesus in our lives, and that we can get up off the ground and get to work doing all that God has asked us to do.