

## Lent Again

Mark 9:2-9

Sunday of the Transfiguration

It was last Wednesday. I was in my office at St. John's looking for some materials for Lent that I knew I had somewhere. Given that Lent was nearly upon us, I wanted those materials to look at for preparation. I looked everywhere for them: my office, the Gathering Area, the Vestry (otherwise known as the place we put on our vestments), even downstairs in the Promise Room. Last, but not least, I went to the prayer room upstairs on the third floor, where of course, I found them.

But, that's not all I found. I also found myself in Lent. The little altar there, the prayer books, and even the colors were set up for Lent, until I realized that they were never taken down. It was Lent still. The last time

anyone went in this wonderful little prayer room for contemplation or for an Adult Education class, or for small group classes was in Lent – Last Lent.

This little place still rested in a journey to the cross and back again, a time that continued still. And, just beside myself, recognizing that this year had wound itself around back yet again to the journey to Lent while in a pandemic, I slumped down in the chair and said out loud, "Ah well, at least I don't have to take all this down yet."

Now, I have heard many a sermon on today's celebration of Jesus transfigured on a mountaintop in front of three of his disciples; that mystery moment in time where the brilliance of God is on full display, so much that we really can't explain it or know it fully although we try to explain it and know it. I certainly have preached my fair share of sermons on this Bible text.

I have preached on the practical implications of this scripture, talking about metaphorical and even physical mountaintop experiences and although we long to stay on the mountaintop having that divine, ecstatic spiritual experience, we always have to come back down to the the hard work of the world, to descend yet again down to the valley where “real life” is.

I have preached how, yet again, Peter, the blundering, dunderheaded rough man, not knowing what to say but feeling like he needs to say something, in total fear says, “Let’s stay here! I’ll build three tents!” only to point out that yet again, the disciples don’t understand who Jesus is and what he is to do, what the voice in the cloud indicated and the line of succession from Elijah to Jesus was meant to show.

And, I have preached how the disciples get down from the mountaintop and seem to forget everything that happened, that they have lost their way, blundering their

way through the rest of the Gospel and there should be some lesson for us there about how easy it is to have the experience of God and then just forget that the Christian life takes practice and that there are no easy answers of who God is in the person of Jesus.

But, I don’t feel any of that this year. I am already Lent weary despite my love for the structure of the season of Lent. And, although these interpretations of the Transfiguration are indeed there and they have merit, I’m a bit tired of the hard slog down the mountain.

For one, we just wrapped right back around to Lent where we didn’t even clean up from. We’ve lived one full year of a pandemic together. I’m tired of coming back down the mountain, stumbling over rocks; my knees are fatigued. I’m parched on this wilderness journey, longing for living water, longing for renewal – Give me the mountaintop, please! Let me linger just a bit. Don’t you want to?

Lingering just a tad longer at the mountaintop this week has given me a new way of seeing this mysterious cosmic event of Christ being revealed as godhead. This pandemic has changed my view, something I may never have seen if not for it. Notice that when Peter professed, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us make three dwelling, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah,” Jesus doesn’t correct him. Jesus doesn’t rebuff him for being afraid.

He doesn’t say, “No, Peter, we go back down the mountain to do the hard work of serving people.” Jesus doesn’t reprimand him by saying that following him isn’t about spiritual experiences and revelation, but only of taking up your cross. Why doesn’t Jesus scold Peter? Jesus scolds Peter in other times in the Gospels. He rebukes his disciples for not understanding him at other times. Why not here?

I can’t help but wonder that it is because Peter gets it right, that although he doesn’t

fully understand what is happening in his fear, he still gets how big a deal it is? Isn’t then what Peter says less a silly statement out of fear, but instead one of awe, gazing upon the Divine One of the Universe revealed fully in splendor to him? Perhaps it’s because Peter finally has something right that he isn’t rebuked.

Indeed, in this image of the transfigured Christ, Peter and the other two disciples see something that we all need to know right now, that in just this brief time, Peter sees the humanity of Jesus joined with the eternal glory of God, glimpsing the mystery of our faith: that God became human so that we could be closer to God. This divine one is near us always, on the mountaintop and down in the trenches. Occasionally, we need to tarry awhile on the mountain *because* life in the world is so hard and following the life of faith is, too.

The Transfiguration of our Lord and the Resurrection of our Lord are two bookends

that keep all the in between together. These two events are the glue to keep it all together, so that when we do have difficulty off the mountain and in the valleys of life, we can more boldly follow as best we can. And, although we cannot fully witness either bookend until the day of Jesus Christ, we receive those glimpses where we may linger just a bit:

- in the waters of Holy Baptism
- in the bread and wine
- in God's word
- in the natural world where even on the coldest of days a shining sun warms us.

We can remember and experience the day of Transfiguration when the miracle of the forgiveness of sins is declared to us. These little transformations bring us to a place where we may stay just awhile, so that when we must carry on in other places, we do so knowing we aren't alone. We are not rebuked for our longing and our blundering, for our wanting divine inspiration and

tangible signs. Peter wasn't. Neither, then, are we.

Today, let us tarry just a bit on the mountain. Lent is with us soon enough. In the meantime, we catch a glimpse of the transforming revelation of who Jesus is, God the indwelling human one. We can sit down and rest with him if we need to, asking that God give us a glimpse of the shining victory of Resurrection today and now.

It's been a long haul since last Lent for all of us.

Let's bask just a bit in the glow of glory and ask God to refresh us for the journey ahead.

For it is good for us to be here.

Amen.