

St. Alban's Last Sunday of Epiphany Year C February 10, 2013
Exodus 34:29-35 • Psalm 99 • 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2 • Luke 9:28-36

Today is the last Sunday of Epiphany and a time when we traditionally hear the story of the Transfiguration of Christ. We hear the story of Christ who takes three disciples with Him to the mountain to pray. And there, these disciples, Peter, John, and James, see Christ transformed into a radiant glowing being all white and dazzling. Jesus is transfigured.

We may think we know what dazzling bright is, we have all seen bright lights. But place yourself with the three. There are on a mountain in the desert, and it is daytime. If you have been in the desert mountains when the sun is out, it is already bright.

For Jesus's clothes to become "dazzling white" must have been quite a sight. No wonder Peter and John and James were able to stay awake despite their sleepiness.

I wonder what they were thinking. Did they know it was Moses and Elijah they were seeing with Jesus? Did they recognize the representation of the Law in Moses and the Prophets in Elijah? Would you are I?

Or, would you or I be like Peter and fill the silence, the awe of the moment, with conversation and ask a silly question like "Hey, can we put up some tents and hang out for a while?" That would be me.

It is only in looking back and reflecting on the moment that the disciples realized what they were seeing, but that is later after they go down the mountain, after the passion. They witness Christ being transformed, being transfigured. The appearance of Christ's face changes. His clothes are made anew. He is brought together with the Law and the Prophets.

And what does that mean, being seen with the Law and the Prophets?

We find the answer in the Gospel of Matthew. When asked which Commandment is the greatest, what does Jesus say? Many of us know the answer

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Dazzling white, changed appearance, the embodiment of the Law and the Prophets. Wow! And it is not over, not yet.

As Peter is filling the moment of awe with words, with words that are meaningless, a cloud comes upon them.

So are you getting it? Jesus grabs three of his closest disciples and says, come on, let's go up there and pray for a while. They go, they pray, they are sleepy. Then Jesus's face changes appearance, Jesus's clothes become dazzling white, two of the greatest leaders of past history appear beside Jesus. Do you think they were on overload? I don't know about you, but I would be.

This was not your normal day praying with Jesus.

And then a cloud comes to this bright mountain top, a cloud overshadows all that is happening.

Do you think it might be an understatement when the Gospel of Luke tells us "and they were terrified as they entered the cloud"? Yes, I think terrified might not cover how I would feel if I was one of them.

And what happens next?

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They hear a voice, a voice that verifies all they have just seen, a voice that says "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to Him"

And how do you think that voice sounded? My first inclination is to think of a booming voice like in the movies of the 50's and 60's. Initially, I hear a loud, deep, scary voice. I am even more terrified. But, this is God, this is the embodiment of LOVE. I really think these disciples, these poor terrified disciples, heard a still small voice when they heard the voice of God.

(softly) "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to Him"

They heard a voice so filled with love and gentleness all the terror went away.

(Repeat) "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to Him"

All was well with the world. Peter and John and James were with Jesus, the embodiment of all creation.

I have to believe, that from that point forward, deep in their hearts, they remembered the truth they witnessed that day, they knew Jesus as the Messiah, as God. Sure they walked into future denials, fear and betrayals, but, deep in their hearts, I have to believe they knew, they knew the truth, they knew the promise we all have to be made anew, to be made a new creation.

If we are lucky, if we are able to focus on God, many of us can experience some form of that clarity, some form of God's presence; that gives us faith; that gives us a reason to try to live into Christ's teachings. But it can be hard. We are surrounded by so much information today, so much news; too much information.

And I am about to add to it. I am now going to talk about protecting God's Creation, about how Jesus, as the embodiment of that creation calls us to protect God's earth. As I do, as I talk about these things, remember the promise of how the disciples went with Jesus to pray and heard the still small voice of God. And we can talk about how God can lead us through this mess.

During adult ED today we talked about how the Bible calls us to be caregivers of creation, caregivers of an embodied Christ. And there are many facts that compel us to do something.

Our earth has warmed and is continuing to warm, changing the nature of the climate drastically.

A friend of mine tells of a film "Hungry Tides" which portrays the plight of the people of the Republic of Kiribas, a chain of low lying islands in the south Pacific where over 100,000 native people call home. Their home is being consumed by rising tides from melting glaciers. An entire country will be displaced from their native land through absolutely no fault of their own. How will they adapt? Who will come to their aid? Where will they call home? What will happen to their culture?

A warmer climate threatens the nation's forests increasing the risk of wildfires and insect infestations, and generating more frequent floods and droughts, warns a report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Our weather patterns are becoming more and more unpredictable with significant swings in precipitation and temperature and increase risks from higher storm surges. After Hurricane Sandy New York city and the surrounding area are facing billions and billions of improvements to keep the sea out.

Prolonged drought in the Horn of Africa is the immediate cause of the severe food crisis already affecting around 10 million people in parts of Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia.

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And, a group of researchers in California notes the current rise over the course of the last decade, of asthma and other respiratory illnesses could become more widespread and grow in severity due to global warming. They add that climate change may also lead to more mold created by flooding from storms, heat wave deaths, a longer pollen season, and can shift ranges of certain disease-causing animals, such as mosquitoes.

Now I can cite facts up here all day long. I only do it to remind us all that the impact of climate change is upon us now and the transfigured Christ is calling us to action. An action based on the Law and the Prophets, an action based on Christ's call for us to Love God and Love our neighbor. The facts I touched on can be overwhelming; they can terrify us into inaction. This information glut can make us feel like the disciples when the cloud overshadowed all they saw, changing amazement into terror. This cloud of information, the facts, the pictures of receding glaciers and rising waters is terrifying.

Now I ask you to remember what the disciples found in this terrifying cloud. They found the still small voice of God saying to them

(softly) "This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to Him"

And when we listen we can find solutions. Some of the folks in this room may hear that voice saying get actively involved, become a volunteer, with Interfaith Power and Light; become involved in education and advocacy. And believe me-- those of us involved will welcome you with open arms. But most in this room will not hear that particular call. And that is OK. But we all hear the call to love God (and God's creation) and love our neighbor. We all can do that by each doing our own small part. By driving the speed limit, by controlling the thermostats in our home, by buying local food to cut transportation costs, making sensible changes to our life styles, to take care of God's environment. This also is a long list that goes on with many wonderful ideas.

You will be seeing in your email news a Lenten Carbon Fast Calendar with many of these ideas. Try them out. Find out what works for you. And on the days you see something you are already doing rejoice and thank God and tell a friend.

You know climate change is a big problem. When you think about it you might feel yourself in a cloud where you know nothing. I believe, when we all listen to that still small voice in the cloud, the terrifying cloud will change. It will change into a swarm of people all trying to do what Christ calls us to do. When we all do our small part, when we all respond to Christ's call to love God and love our neighbor by acting responsibly, amazing things will happen. We will have a significant and positive impact on climate change. We will be living into Christ's call to love God and our neighbor.

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, Amen