

# Your vision in God's vision

Friend of Moses, strength of Elijah, you go with your people and give them your Spirit: may the Child of your heart transfigure the mortal world that love may know no bounds; through Jesus Christ, the beloved one. Amen.

*A Collect for the Last Sunday after the Epiphany, Prayers for an Inclusive Church*

## THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 99; 1 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

February 26, 2017

### ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

THE REV. RANDALL C.K. DAY, D.MIN., PRIEST AND RECTOR

#### THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 17:1-9

Six days after Peter had acknowledged Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Anyone can have a vision on a mountaintop – and probably many of us have had such visions.

But the mountaintop visions we hear about today – primarily Jesus on the mountain of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, as well as Peter, James and John – but also Moses on Sinai, come in the midst of lives that are

already lives of vision. They are lives of vision lived in the midst of the rest of the real world we know, life with uncertainty, risk, struggle, pain and loss – as well as life of gathering, connection, relationship, love and true joys.

As we read in Peter's account of his experience of the transfiguration of Jesus, Jesus did

not receive vision to be who he was and to do his work in the experience on the mountaintop, rather, the message of his life, of God's undying presence in Jesus and in the world was "more fully confirmed."

Which is to say: what you thought was true of Jesus and the vision he was living is, in fact, reality (reality for the world, for Jesus, for all human beings, for you).

And Peter further expresses the importance of it: "You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

When you're in a dark place, imagine the morning star rising in your heart... that's what this is about.

The point is, the vision Jesus lived, the vision confirmed on the mountain, that would be further confirmed when he goes back down the mountain, was not a private experience for a celebrity religious leader, but a showing to all people of what is possible in life, in all lives, in the experience of humanity, in you and in me.

You and I and everyone can have, likely *do* have the experience of the mountaintop vision.

The experience on the mountain of transfiguration additionally confirmed the oneness

of the presence of God with all that went before, the lives of Moses and Elijah and all who have been part of God's creation, God's continuing and forever showing forth of life on earth.

Again, the life of expressed, embodied vision is not, primarily – in fact, is hardly ever – a matter for mountaintops.

Look again at how the mountaintop experience ends for Peter, James and John with Jesus. There was the voice of God calling humanity to listen, and to listen particularly to Jesus as Beloved, Jesus as Fully Human One. Then we read: "When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by *fear*. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, '**Get up and do not be afraid.**' And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

Picture for yourself the number of times you – or some group of people you know have been overcome by fear (or some other painful or negative emotion rooted in fear) and then picture the touch of Jesus and his speaking: "Get up and do not be afraid."

As we enter the Lenten season that begins this Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, we have an opportunity to face all of the ways in which we are captured by fear and all of the ways in which we undermine, degrade or lose the

God-given possibilities and realities of our lives and exchange that true identity for fear and its many painful and often destructive expressions – individually, in groups and communities, including in the life of this faith community. We see it all the time internationally, nationally, locally, personally... no surprise – though we sometimes are not clear that all this hateful chaos is arising from our fear that distances us from all that God desires for us....

As is always the case, what God reveals in Jesus has nothing to do with creating passive, religious robots but is an ever-ongoing invitation and encouragement to discover within ourselves and among ourselves together the fullness of God's light, life and love, expressed, first of all, in specific, unrelenting, compassionate hospitality and spreading widely from that initial experience of our own selves being drawn into the grace-filled welcome of God's own self.

In an anxious and reactive world we can easily and routinely do become anxious and reactive people.

In the process we get sick and die – and we radiate illness and death to others in a thousand and one different ways.

Jesus is God's continual response: immediate, specific

radiating, light, life and love-filled. Recall that physical touch of Jesus reaching across the distance, extended to Peter, James and John in the story of the Transfiguration.

Where we feel the ashes this Wednesday, we recall that all of this that we hear, that we enter, that we say and do, that is our daily being – individually and with others – is to take actual form in the generosity of God that envelopes us and with which we engage those around us. We become that hand of God reaching, touching.

Sometimes this life involves risk, involves new or different experiences, is painful, tiring or otherwise costly, presents new and unfamiliar patterns and evokes the confusion we see in the disciples with Jesus as they came face-to-face with the fullness of the life they were living – to which they had not been attentive even in the dark places (even though they were certainly trying!).

This Ash Wednesday I begin a long-overdue sabbatical that will bring all of us new experiences of God's light, love, possibility and hope in the fullness of our living as specific persons and a specific community of faith in this specific neighborhood of our actual world.

This is a time of real promise in which God's presence, God's touch, God's assurance will be

“more fully confirmed” as we are “attentive” to these days “as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises” in our hearts and in the heart of St. Mark’s and this neighborhood and world that God so loves.

From time to time any of us may, likely will, fall to the ground overcome by fear, as the disciples did on the holy mountain (where we still live) and, at the same time, God gives each of us and all of us the call and actual gifts to reach out and touch one another saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.”

We can say and put into action “Get up and do not be afraid” all day, every day. Don’t hesitate when it is your time to say it in words or things you do.

Here is the vision that is yours, that is mine, that is ours together, ours with uncounted billions of other human beings on this planet God is loving right now.

This Lent, during this sabbatical time, how will you welcome God’s own self, the love and touch of Jesus, and how will you embody this undying compassionate life here and among all whom you encounter?

For better or worse, there’s nothing theoretical in any of this, this is the life we are living now, today, here – and the same thing again tomorrow and in each of our

tomorrows. And all of this is in the transfiguring light, life and love of God in which we are growing, that has no beginning nor any ending and in which each of us and all of us together are in our very free, very practical, very human, very gifted ways living, moving and acting.



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