



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, FEBRUARY 11, 2018
2 KINGS 2: 1-12; PSALM 50: 1-6; 2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-6; MARK 9:2-9

GOODNESS REVEALED

Mark 9:2-9 [Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.]

There are two main ways in and out of Holden Village in the summer: by foot or by bus. Those of you who have been there know it takes a lot of effort to get to Holden. Holden is nestled in the North Cascades many miles from Chelan, so you really have to want to go if you visit. Some people hike in, but most opt for the easier way into the remote mountain valley. That easier way includes riding in an old, yellow school bus along a steep, bumpy road for ten break taking miles.

A sign hangs in one of those busses that reads: “The trip up is free. The trip down is costly.” Several years ago, we overheard two backpackers talking about the sign. When the first one noticed it, he turned to his friend and asked, rather anxiously, if he had any money. The friend looked puzzled and asked why. “Because we have to pay. Don’t you see the sign!” The second backpacker was quiet for a moment. Then he turned and said, “Stop worrying about the money. That’s not

what the sign is about. There's some deeper meaning we don't yet understand."

I wonder if that's how the disciples felt at the Transfiguration. In their terrified haze, they knew they had witnessed something profound that day. They also knew it would take the rest of their lives to unpack the deeper meaning of their mountaintop experience. The cost of that encounter would change all of us in ways that could never be calculated.

Today is the Feast Day of the Transfiguration. It is the day when Jesus's full glory is revealed, ever so briefly, to his closest friends. Every year, this mountaintop experience marks the close of Epiphany season. Epiphany ends as it began, with Jesus revealed as God's beloved Son. But today's glory is visible only for an instant. Before his disciples can absorb what is happening, the face of Jesus changes back one they have always recognized. In their confused state, they are left to wonder about this ominous event and what it might foreshadow for later.

All of the synoptic gospels agree on the details of the Transfiguration. Jesus takes his inner circle up a mountain to pray. As soon as they summit, Jesus is changed in some inexplicable way. Moses and Elijah show up to talk with this glorified Jesus. A voice calls out from the cloud, and then

everything returns to normal. As they leave, they are sworn to secrecy.

Even though we hear this story each year, there is always some new insight waiting to be found.

What I find intriguing this year is Peter's terror. It is no ordinary fear. Instead, the Greek text indicates they are *scared out of their minds*. You know the feeling. It's that same kind of terror that causes your breath to quicken, jolts your heart to beat more rapidly, and induces queasy feelings in the pit of your stomach. That's the kind of terror I think Peter experiences.

That terror is understandable. Only a few days before, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah. Rather than basking in that knowledge, Jesus reacts in a strange way. He insists he must endure terrible suffering, rejection, and then die. That's not what Peter was expecting. When Peter rejects such crazy talk, Jesus rebukes him. That's not all. Jesus sternly tells Peter and all his followers to get ready. We, too, will have our own crosses to bear and will follow Jesus in his same fate.

If Peter had any lingering doubts, those doubts burned away in a flash. Not only was Jesus's glory revealed, so, too, was the truth of Jesus's teaching. The transfiguration confirmed what Peter feared might be true. Without the cross,

there could be no new life...no resurrection.

I wonder if there was another reason Peter might have been terrified. When the voice boomed from the cloud, God affirmed the belovedness of Jesus. That belovedness was not Jesus's alone to bear. The Transfiguration affirmed of the goodness inherent in Jesus. It also affirmed the goodness inherent in all of humanity. To understand the depths of Jesus's belovedness, Peter would have to understand and accept his own goodness, too. Only then would Jesus's transformation and all that happened after it make sense. Only then could the disciples truly begin to change the world in ways God intended. That was a scary idea then and now.

Accepting the inherent goodness in each other is much harder than it sounds. When I was in fifth grade, a new girl showed up at school one day. The teacher decided to put her next me. She would stay there the rest of the year until her family moved on. Annette and I got to know each other pretty fast. She was quiet but kind. We worked well together on projects. We helped each other when the other was feeling down or confused.

After Annette had been there awhile, I noticed her sitting by herself at recess. This continued for several days.

Eventually, I realized Annette didn't have any friends. I decided then to change that, but first, I needed to know something. That night, I went home and asked my mom if was okay to be friends Annette. Annette was black, and she was the first black person I had known. I wanted to accept her as she was, but I didn't know how. I asked my mom not so much to get her permission, but because I needed her affirmation. I needed to hear her say it was okay to be and do something different.

Increasingly, the world tells us all the wrong things matter. Skin color, gender identity, and political and religious affiliation describe characteristics about who we are at face value. Those labels also help us understand who we are in relation to each other. But all too often, those labels are used to judge and exclude anyone who is different from the accepted norm.

Those human made labels say nothing about who we are in relation to God. Belovedness in God's eyes has nothing to do with race or nationality or who we voted for. Belovedness has everything to do with the inherent goodness revealed on that mountain through Jesus. The world tries hard to undermine that truth and to sever our connection with God. Thankfully, God has other ideas. Thankfully, God accepts us as we are, and

thankfully, that is enough. Accepting that reality is scary and difficult. It is also one of the most countercultural acts of faith we can practice.

For the last several weeks, one particular Taize chant has haunted my thoughts. I most often associate the chant with the suffering Jesus endured on Good Friday. The words remind me of the desperate pleas Jesus must have made to God as he hung on the cross. “Stay with me. Remain with me. Watch and pray.” I wonder, too, how those words give voice to many of our own pleadings with God... pleas to God to stick around long enough so we all can be sweep up into the perfect world God intends.

We humans are not the only ones who cry out. So does God. When the voice calls out from the cloud, God also issues a plea. Promise me, God begs, that you will stick it out to the end. Promise me you will stay with me no matter what. Promise me that you know how much I love you.

Eventually we must all head down the mountain. The trip will be costly. The journey will demand all we can give, and it will change us forever. That journey will continue soon enough. For now, give thanks for the glory revealed in Jesus and rest in knowledge of Jesus’s belovedness and of yours, too.

AMEN.



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

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