

Season of EPIPHANY



Prayers

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in Your Son Your glory tabernacled in human flesh and blood to bring to us eternal life. Open the eyes of all people to see the glory of God in the face of Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lover of the human race, Moses and Elijah appeared with the Saviour in glory to witness that all the law and the prophets speak of Him. Give all pastors and servants of the Church such clarity in their teaching, that all who listen to them may hear the voice of the Saviour calling them to life. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

King of the nations, You intend all authority upon the earth to be a blessing, not a burden. Remember those entrusted with civil authority here and in all places, and enable them to serve with wisdom and integrity. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Comforter of the sorrowing, You alone can bring peace that passes understanding to aching hearts. Remember all who are ill, hospitalized, lonely, afflicted or dying [especially Your servants _____ and those we name in our hearts]. Let them sense Your presence, taste Your peace and experience healing and relief according to Your gracious will. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

Immortal One, You raised Your Son from the dead by Your life-giving Spirit, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters who share in His endless life and glory. Receive our thanks for Moses, Elijah, Peter, James, John and all who have fallen asleep in our Saviour's faith and friendship. Bring us to behold with them the fullness of His glory in the age to come. Lord, in Your mercy, hear our prayer.

All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant to us, all-glorious Trinity, for You are a good God and You love Your whole creation. To You we give all glory, honour and worship: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and forever! Amen.

Collect of the Day

O God, in the glorious transfiguration of Your beloved Son You confirmed the mysteries of the faith by the testimony of Moses and Elijah. In the voice that came from the bright cloud You wonderfully foreshowed our adoption by grace. Mercifully make us co-heirs with the King in His glory and bring us to the fullness of our inheritance in heaven; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalm 50:1-6
(antiphon v. 2)
2 Kings 2:1-12
or Exodus 34:29-35
2 Corinthians 3:12-13 (14-18); 4:1-6
Mark 9:2-9

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 413
Other Hymns – 583 (OT1, G), 578
(E), 523 (E), 414 (G), 417



EPIPHANY SERMON

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD FEBRUARY 14 2021

Sermon Text: Mark 9:2-9

'Up A High Mountain'

What's it like climbing up a high mountain? Have you ever been? I had a small taste of it in Alaska years ago. At first it's like any ordinary hike. You're walking through the forest, perhaps with a slight rise to the terrain. The birds are singing, the leaves are rustling in the wind. You can even hear the sound of other people down below . . . talking, working. But after a little while those familiar sounds fade away. What's below disappears in the trees and you are just somewhere above, still protected by the forest. But eventually, as you continue to climb, even this protection falls away, and you rise up out of the tree-line and leave the familiar behind. The birds stop singing. The leaves are nowhere to be found. And you reach this moment, this certain height, where you begin to wonder: what am I doing up here? I've never been this high before. Should I even be up here?

We get a real flavour of that from the disciples today, don't we? But not just from the physical mountain they are climbing. No, there's a reason Jesus led them up a high mountain to show them today's revelation. You don't just reveal something like this down on the plain. And why not? Why does this type of vision belong on a mountaintop? Because God created the visible world as an expression of all that is spiritual – like a big art project – what we see with our eyes is the visible version of His spiritual truth. But these two – the visible and invisible, heaven and earth – they're made to come together, aren't they? Yes, they're made to unite in the center of God's creation. That's right. Humanity. You and me. We are the center of His creation. Made in His image. Made according to the same pattern of the whole cosmos, but in seed-size. We're microcosms of the whole. And that means, that the places we see visibly, like mountains, are matched by invisible places within. When you're describing ascending a physical mountain, you're also describing something spiritual that takes place within your heart – called trust, faith, worship. The disciples are going to reach that moment when

they begin to wonder: what am I doing up here? I've never been this high before. Should I even be up here?

Should you? Should I? No, we certainly aren't worthy. We do not feel like we belong. But there's a very specific person leading us. This is His idea . . . and He calls you to join Him. So what are you going to do? Can you trust Him? Will you let Him lead you up?

"And He was transfigured before them, and His clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them." And why? Because heaven and earth have become one in the flesh of this Man. And now, He is revealing it to them. Have you ever wondered what that was like for those disciples? Realizing the sun is hiding inside your friend . . . no, realizing your friend, this Man, the One you know and love, is the source of all light, the Divine Word in human flesh?!

He is the One Moses spoke to centuries earlier on Mount Sinai so that the skin on his face shone. He is the One Elijah spoke to on that same mountain, not in the strong wind, not in the earthquake, but in a low whisper – "What are you doing here?" Yes, that One. But here He is – now a man – pleased to reveal Himself to His disciples in our human flesh. He wants them to see. He wants us to know. Not so we are terrified beyond belief, but so we know who it is that heads down that mountain marching straight to the cross for us. Otherwise we will lose hope. Otherwise it will get too dark. Otherwise we will run away and never come back. But not Him. He won't run. This is why He's here. He's come to put that radiance back into all humanity.

Now, the next thing we're told is that Peter actually opened his mouth in this situation. Why do we open our mouths when instead we should be opening our ears? Why do our hearts presume to move us to do something, when they should remain still and receive? Honestly, what keeps you from being silent? What is it in your life that holds you back from being still, from trusting and receiving from God when He acts? Can you do it? Can you stop yourself and ask Him calmly? Bend your heart low before Him, and presume to pray only when you've checked yourself?

Not Peter. At least not in this moment. "Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." Three tents? What . . . so you can worship all three of them? We make up such funny ideas about God and worship, don't we? We idolize those things that point to

God, instead of God Himself. We're constantly falling short of the top of the mountain . . . even though it's intended for us. And so we must ask ourselves: What tents have I set up in the high places of my heart? How am I splitting my worship, my trust, my confidence – resting it in places that isn't on the radiating One in the center? How have I let fear splinter my attention?

Peter did not know what to say. And neither do we. But it's hard to admit we don't know. We insist on our own made-up worldview. We resist changing it, even when we know there is something not totally stable about it. We fight – that is, until we find ourselves in utter darkness. But God is even kind with His use of darkness. The cloud that overshadowed the disciples did more than stop Peter's mouth. It stopped him in his very center. The Lord brings His darkness to destroy our false world – to remind us that He alone gives understanding – and that we cannot make it up on our own. He created us to understand His view, His way – to understand Him – and that's why He says, "This is My beloved Son; listen to Him." Stop listening to yourselves, listen to Jesus. Stop listening to your desires, listen to Jesus. Stop looking around, listen to Jesus. The moment the Father said this – it was Jesus only. Look to Him alone. Are you looking? Listen to Him alone. Are you listening?

What do you think it would have been like coming down from that mountain? Could life ever be the same? What do you do with an experience like that? Well, Peter learned something there that day. He took that "listen to Him" to heart. For in his letter to the church later in his life he said, 'Yeah, we saw the Divine Majesty there on the mountain. We heard the voice from heaven. But there is something better than this vision – God's Word – which you will do well to pay attention to as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.' Peter got it. Listen to Him, to Jesus. Listen to the Word. It's better than any vision, and it's going into your ear right now . . . like a seed planted in the ground. Will you hear it? Will you let it shine there . . . let it take root and rise there for you too?

And do you know what? When you were united to Him in the waters of Baptism, He deposited that radiant glory into you. To be sure, we don't see it yet . . . not like that day on the mountain. We must wait for the resurrection on the Last Day, as Jesus says; but even now, on the mount of transfiguration, He has shown us what we will be in the end. A new humanity in which God dwells by His own Word and Spirit. Yeah, we're going to shine! This is what Christ has come to bring us. This is what this mountaintop moment shares. The Son of God doesn't simply save us from sin – He also makes us into the glory of God through His very own flesh in which we are One – "Take and eat, this is My body. Take and

drink this is My blood.” “A man shall leave His father and mother and be united to His wife, and the two shall become one flesh” – yes, a marriage as it were . . . a revelation of how God unites Himself to His people through His own flesh in Christ.

Do you realize what this means? His Sacraments are not just memorial rituals, but His way of staying physically united to His bride the Church. They keep her shining, though we see it not. They keep her radiant and pure, though faith alone perceives it. They keep her one with her husband, who in and through them is most certainly present with us. They are our mountaintop moment where heaven and earth are united into one as we wait for the resurrection and reunion with all who are trusting in Him.

Now, however, we’re about to enter Lent. We’re going down from the mountaintop moment onto that dusty road to the cross. This glimpse will be all we get until Easter dawns; and so our Lord prepares us to wait for our own resurrection to see His radiant face. He teaches us, like He did Peter and James and John, that we must wait until that perfect moment when we will finally share in all this with the new humanity in Christ in every way. But one thing is certain – the One who led us up the mountain, also leads us to the cross, and will lead us up out of the empty tomb on His holy Last Day. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.