

2-26-17 Transfiguration Sunday: "Peaks and Valleys" A Reflection on Mt. 17:1-9 by Mark Arbisi, Christ Church, KBK

If the seasons and holy days of the Christian Church year were in a race, with Easter Sunday naturally finishing in first place, then Transfiguration Sunday would be the Silver medal winner. The defeat of Good Friday became the surprise Victory but three days later: The Christ of God was then revealed as the timeless Christ of God, the ever-renewing, creating, life-giving Presence of the Divine among us which lives and exists and reigns supreme above and over all earthly powers—which indeed, the darkness could not overcome. All the goodness, hope and love that we the friends of Jesus daily pray for, endeavor for, indeed, frequently suffer on behalf of, is based on our embrace of the Easter Event; and is grounded on the conviction that indeed the Power of the Divine among us can never be overcome. That is rather huge to say the least. And so we carry on in faith, doing our part, mimicking the ministry of Christ Jesus as God grants us the ability. We do it because we have glimpsed Easter. And in that glimpse we know God is a God who is with us.

Whatever it was that happened up there on that mountaintop it is properly understood as a sneak peak and a foretaste of Easter's first place revelation of God at work mightily among us, surprising evil and darkness with a most unexpected victory over them. What Peter, James and John were treated to up there in the clouds all the rest of us were treated to on Easter Sunday—it's what in a word the Early Church would come to call "Emmanuel," Almighty God among us! Of course, then and now, all of this is a lot to take in. Some achieve faith; others forever wrestle with it, and still others miss the boat entirely. Peter, James and John were among the fortunate of their day and age—their eyes beheld the full revelation of God (though they were indeed imperfect in many ways, didn't miss the boat); and we who gather regularly today are a glorious mix of believers and seekers and Jesus-following-wannabees, who for reasons we may or may not be able to articulate, find ourselves craving such revelations of God among us, be they on mountaintops or wherever—we'll take 'em! Which is really wonderful actually and evidence that God is among us.

When making a sharp turn it is always wise to signal your turn—give others a heads-up; and OMG, if that isn't a rather fine description of today's Gospel Lesson I don't know what is. With the disciples we've been traveling with Jesus, and with each step of our journey we encounter eye-opening discoveries; with each step we take with Jesus we learn something additional about Jesus. Jesus is that kind of guy. He doesn't like to hide under a bushel basket; He likes to shine. He likes to make a splash. He excels at making unforgettable statements that stand out among all others. Indeed, He excels in revealing his nature to the world, the same nature that

we Christians confess is the nature of God being revealed. So, what we do with our lives is rather huge isn't it.

I like that Jesus does this. I like that as the season changes for us, Jesus signals a turn for his closest friends of long ago. Ending now is the out and about, the running around with their beloved teacher, Jesus. All of their submersion into amazing teachings and exposure to countless examples of healing and hospitality, are well, coming to an end—the earthly ministry of Jesus is winding down abruptly. A different sort of drum starts to beat. A drum that is also a countdown toward the Cross...kaboom, kaboom, kaboom... So, a most significant turn. I like that at such a decisive moment Jesus blesses his friends with quality time away, with a gift that will keep on giving, with yes, to use a cliché, with an unmistakable “foretaste of glory divine,” a taste that will linger forever in their mouths, a tasty treat that will help get them through each and every day that lies ahead. To each of them, and to us, Jesus offers a light to break through the worlds' darkness. A light to see by, a light to steer by. Which is an amazing blessing for all those days when any one of us begin to question the goodness of God, days when in contrast to the light show on the high place, life feels restrictive, cold, heavy-laden, days when life is full of fear, far from what God intends, when life becomes a dark, confining, confusing place. On such days we have this brief, shining, ultimate moment with Jesus to cradle in our hearts.

But the terrain is now shifting under the disciples feet. Gone are the leisurely days on the lush green hills of the Galilee, the good times in the sun, among good buds; and enter stage left, a death march with Jesus towards the “powers and principalities” of man, toward the occupied Capital City filled with corruption and cronyism, the place with a Cross with Jesus's name on it sticking out of the stone just outside its gates. From heavenly heights to the darkest valley—quite the turn of events for anyone to take--Peter, James and John—anyone, especially anyone who incorrectly expects their walk with Jesus to be as a stroll down a primrose path. And so, I like that Jesus signals this turn in an unforgettable “song and dance” show sort of way. Friends, let there be no confusion, what took place in that moment with Jesus was an act of infinite love.

I like that our Jesus considers his closest friends. I like that our Jesus has time to minister to them at an exceedingly difficult time in life. I like that our Jesus pulls back the veil of his humanity, his commonness, his solidarity with human flesh, and lets his full divinity break loose and fill the sky. I like that the revelation of his divine nature is linked to Moses, the Law Giver, and Elijah, the preachers' prophet; I like that in that high and holy place a line through time is drawn, that dots are connected, that it becomes abundantly clear that God is acting in and through our Jesus in the same way that God has acted in and through others, in and through time itself. I like that God at that time and that place is not illusive, is not bashful, is standout'ish, is

utterly brazen. I like it because, God knows, there are way too many other days, ordinary days, when people of faith are not privileged to moments that in any way resemble that moment. I like that I, and you, and all of us can recall the Glory of God revealed in our Christ because it means we're able to stand firmer in our faith, more resolute in our trust, more confident that powers of goodness are engaged beyond our expectations, our perceptions, our finite limitations, our brokenness; and yet is so close as to throw us off guard at any given moment...and like Peter, James and John, bring us down onto our knees, incoherent and awestruck.

And yes, I also rather selfishly confess that I'm not crazy about the fact that the moment came to a most sudden conclusion, cuz I would have liked that moment to last forever, I would have liked being part of such an eternity. I would have liked being born into a perfect world, orchestrated by grace, a world where ignorance, storm clouds and disparaging words are not present as they are, filling my waking moments. I would have liked that very much. But alas, as we all know, the way of the world does not long resemble mountaintop experiences.

In a similar vein I'm saddened that our Jesus instructed his three lieutenants to "tell no one about the vision..." To my mind the world desperately needs and would clearly benefit from far more open and free discussions of such visions; to my mind the world would be profoundly blessed with much more open sharing about ultimately what are the most standout'ish and important experiences of our lives—the undisputed moments spent bathing in holiness. I'm sad because I fear that Jesus' "tell no one" line to his three friends has unintendedly by Jesus, ingrained itself in the rest of our heads as well. I can't help but entertain the thought: what visions and insights of God, what experiences have we had of God's grace and presence and love in our lives that we've not shared with a blessed soul—that we've told no one about! And in not share, not telling, not pronouncing, what visions of God have we permitted to slip into the place of forgetfulness, that we've lost contact with...what visions have we denied ourselves? And like Peter, how many times have we found ourselves muttering from the shadows, "I'm not one of them...I don't know Him."

Friends, it is now the other side of Easter. Jesus says it's now okay to tell everyone about everything we know and experience from and of God. We can talk freely now of Jesus. We can now openly share our moments of intimacy with God. This side of Easter, as we are, there is absolutely nothing holding us back, anymore than any one of us can send Jesus back into the tomb. The genie is out of the bottle and it is up to us to share the good news.

Friends, the terrain is forever shifting under our feet, we are always moving back and forth between peaks and valleys, we are always moving from light places to dark places. And like our Jesus before us, and because of our Jesus, we know and understand the importance of bringing goodness with us, of sharing our knowledge of the high and holy places with those who presently are in life's valleys; we know, like our Jesus before us, how just a little bit of meaningful light—a shared moment of sincerity, a gesture of charity, an assuring “you can do it” affirmation, an earnest expression of forgiveness or a meaningful example of selflessness—can completely transform any ordinary day into an extraordinary day for someone somewhere, and for us too, when someone extends light to us, on days when we're down and out, feeling blue, or just rather impotent in the face of current events.

Friends, be light-bearers, be mountaintop people, be epiphany people, be Easter people, freely share your visions of God, always, live in and live out the knowledge of God's grace and God's goodness and God's foundational place in your lives.

May God make it so, Amen.