

SHINING MOMENTS

Transfiguration of Our Lord – B February 11, 2018

Mark 9:2-9

The season of Epiphany comes to a close this week; so our gospel reading gives us the most brilliant of epiphanies, the culmination of revelations, on which to go out. While the Transfiguration event itself is not placed at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, it is a pivotal point in Jesus' life and ministry that reminds us who Jesus is and how he is connected to the history of his people.

The team who put our lectionary together (the readings for the church year) gave us an Old Testament manifestation of God in the story of Elijah being raised up to the heavens. That passage from 2 Kings affirms Elijah's place among the greatest of prophets and, with the parting of the waters of the Jordan River, harkens back to Moses parting the Red Sea. That scene sets things up for the gospel account of the Transfiguration of Jesus, where Jesus glows in a brilliant light as he is seen on the mountaintop in the company of our two Old Testament heroes, Moses and Elijah.

In our gospel account, which is also recorded in Matthew and Luke, Jesus is not only in the company of the greatest representatives of The Law and The Prophets; but the disciples who joined Jesus on this journey are awed and frightened. Peter, always quick with a word, finally stammers out something like: "Rabbi, it is good to be here; let's make three dwellings, so you, Moses, and Elijah can camp out here for a while." Suddenly a cloud overshadows them, and the voice in the cloud announces: "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" And, just like that, Moses and Elijah were gone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus warned the disciples not to tell anyone about what they had seen, until after he had been risen from the dead. (In verse 10, not included in today's selection, the disciples ask each other what this "rising from the dead" could mean.)

Some have described the Transfiguration as "one of Jesus' miracles; although, this time, the miracle was happening to Jesus." [Wikipedia: *Transfiguration of Jesus*, notes 3-6] There's a tendency to focus on the scene, rather than the sign. Peter wants to remain on the mountain, but the voice of the Almighty (the sign that identifies Jesus as God's Son) tells Peter and the others to listen to Jesus, who obviously tells them that they have to leave the mountain and rejoin their community where the real business of manifesting the Divine takes place. If nothing else, the disciples who were with Jesus would have been convinced by this divine manifestation to stay the course in their ministry with him.

So why this reading on this day? It sets the scene to remind us that continuing to follow Jesus is not about inoculating us from the pain and misery of this world, but rather opens our eyes to the fact that that we will see and feel suffering on that journey of salvation. We transition from the season of Epiphany to the season of Lent aware that the forces of this world will try to extinguish the light. But darkness will not have the last word. Pastor David Lose reminds us that Jesus knows exactly where this journey is headed for him; hence the reference to the Son of Man being "risen from the dead." [Lose: *In the Meantime* for February 11, 2018 at www.davidlose.net] "Resurrection, of course, is a hopeful note, but it does not just imply, but pretty much necessitates, death!"

At any point in time, we bear witness to the brokenness of this world. The Apostle Paul reminded us "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers..." So we witness a

Youngstown OH man being deported after 39 years in this country, violence hitting churches and schools, a war in Afghanistan that has lasted longer than any other in which Americans have fought, hunger, poverty, and lack of medical care in the richest nation. Evil manifests itself in opiate addiction, domestic violence, suspicion and hatred either shared openly or covertly vented on the Internet.

People of God, there's work to be done, and perhaps it's never been so urgently stated as we see it in the gospel of Mark, where the word "immediately" appears 42 of the 79 total occurrences in the New Testament.

To be sure, there are signs of hope in our midst: little manifestations of the Holy One that we see in our daily living. Friday night, after returning from a delightful "After Dark" class at All Saints, I stayed up long enough to watch the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics. I saw Koreans come together under one flag, and witnessed an entire stadium representing the nations of the world, shining lights together as four Korean artists sang John Lennon's "Imagine."

We don't need to go to a mountaintop to witness a transfiguration; because in those little shining moments when God's children reach out in acceptance and love, we can see that Jesus brought the Transfiguration down to us.

In the Nicene Creed we will recite together in a few minutes, we profess: "For us and for our salvation [Jesus] came down from heaven," and "by the power of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary he became truly human." Jesus came down because this is the world where love needs to be manifested, where grace becomes real, where life becomes the gift.

"You may say I'm a dreamer; but I'm not the only one." You and I have been called, not just to witness transfiguring moments, but to make them happen, too.

"And the world will be *as one*." Amen.