

Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church

Last Epiphany, February 14, 2021

READINGS:

2 Kings 2:1-12

Psalm 50:1-6

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Mark 9:2-9

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As followers of the Lord Jesus, our lives are full of mountaintops, valleys, and level plains; dark places and light ones; crosses and crowns!

It sometimes seems strange how God uses all the places and times of our lives: the high places and the low places and the level places; the dark places and light ones; the crowns and even the crosses in our lives to show us that he IS, and that he IS WITH us.

In our Gospel today, Mark invites us to the mountaintop. His telling of the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus is so vivid, we feel we are there!

We can almost see Jesus' clothes become whiter than anyone on earth could get them, even with bleach.

We are listening when Moses and Elijah appear, talking to Jesus, though Mark doesn't tell us what they say!

We are there, too, when Peter, who is terrified and yet wants to hold onto the minute, asks to stay in it by building three houses for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus.

We can almost see the cloud cover the sun and hear the voice from the cloud say "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

That is a mountaintop experience!

And we are there, too, when suddenly Peter and James and John find themselves alone with Jesus, making the trip back down the hill to the valley below, to Jerusalem, and to the passion and death of their Lord.

In Epiphany we have heard how Jesus is shown forth to the world as God's Son, Emmanuel, God-With-Us. We have heard the mountaintop stories, and it all comes to this - to Jesus transfigured, and to the command "Listen to him!"

This Wednesday we begin again the walk to the cross with our Lord, as we do every year at this time, in this season called Lent. We will now hear the valley stories, and it will all come to this - to Jesus crucified, dead, and laid to rest in a borrowed tomb.

Just think of poor Elisha in today's reading from the second book of Kings. He knows that God will soon take Elijah into heaven, yet he stays with him as long as he can, from Gilgal to Bethel; from Bethel to Jericho and on to the far side of the Jordan River. He doesn't want to discuss it with the other prophets when they ask what he knows. He knows, and he watches as the chariot of fire and horses of fire separate him from Elijah and Elijah ascends into heaven in the whirlwind. He recognizes God and cries aloud, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen," and still he tears his clothes in two in mourning.

That is a valley experience!

After they see Jesus transfigured and hear the voice from the cloud, the disciples have to walk back down from their mountaintop experience, instructed to tell no one what they have seen until after Jesus rises from the dead.

After he sees Elijah carried into heaven by the whirlwind, Elisha has to pick up the mantle left for him, and go forward through his valley experience to get on with his own ministry as a prophet called by God.

So what about us? What are we to do, as disciples of the Lord Jesus, in this Year of Our Lord two thousand twenty-one, with OUR mountains and OUR valleys?

I think Mark shared the transfiguration with us so that we, too, would hear the voice from the cloud say: "This is my Son, the Beloved; LISTEN to him!"

LISTEN TO HIM - what does the Son of God say to us? He says the greatest commandment is to love God with everything we have, and our neighbors as much as ourselves. He says to be his disciples we must pick up our crosses and follow him. He says he is always with us - ALWAYS - to the end of the age. He is with us on the mountaintops, and in the lowest valleys, and at our crosses - ALWAYS and ALWAYS!

Our collect for today asks that through faith we will SEE the light of Christ, and be STRENGTHENED to bear our crosses, and be CHANGED into his likeness from glory to glory. To behold the light of Christ, to bear crosses, and to be changed. I think that is our call as the Christian body now, whether from our mountaintops or from our deepest valleys. That has always been our call. "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

There are plenty of crosses to bear in this time, aren't there? We don't have to look very far to see them. Crosses of suffering and illness. Crosses of fear and anxiety. Crosses of hunger and lost jobs and homelessness. Crosses of anger and despair. Crosses of violence, meanness, hate and injustice. They look heavy and loaded with splinters. They are very scary. We don't really want to pick them up and carry them. We struggle with them, and all around us our brothers and sisters are struggling to carry theirs.

Saint Paul tells us today that we do not proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as slaves for the sake of others. Slaves who carry the light of Christ in our hearts. That light does not take away those scary crosses, but it does give those who are faithful the courage and strength to pick them up and carry them after the Lord.

There is a story about someone who once asked a child who the saints of God are. His response: "They're the people the light shines through!" The child was referring to the stained glass windows in his home church, but his words ring true! The saints of God ARE the people the light shines through, pointing others to the Christ.

I wonder, what happens when the "people the light shines through" are brave enough to reach out as servants and take a little bit of a neighbor's splintery old cross and carry it, even just for a little while? Maybe THAT is what we do, as disciples of the Lord Jesus, in this Year of Our Lord two thousand twenty-one, with OUR mountains and OUR valleys! We carry crosses up and down them, and sometimes not just ours! Sometimes, we carry them for our neighbors!

There are so many crosses on so many backs in this time. Maybe that is a good project for us in Lent this year. Whenever we can, we let the light shine! I think every time we, the slaves of Jesus, reach out in love to help others carry their crosses, his light shines stronger in us. I think in that lifting, we are TRANSFORMED into his likeness, little by little, from glory to glory!

May your Lenten journey this year be truly blessed.

Amen.