

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we have the culmination of the Epiphany season with the Transfiguration of our Lord on the top of the mountain. Within the Gospel lessons of the Revised Common Lectionary leading up to this day of Transfiguration, the appointed Gospel lessons of the Epiphany-tide or the Epiphany Season, celebrated the manifestation of Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world. Within these appointed Gospel lessons, God's glory is revealed to all nations and to all peoples through Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world, revealed amidst the darkness of this world. And so today the light of the presence of Jesus Christ heard in the Gospel lessons has brought us to the quintessential mountaintop experience in scripture.

Here today in our Gospel we along Peter, John, and James have a glimpse of divine glory, revealed within the gathering of the three disciples as well as Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. And as the quaint gathering is breaking up, we hear a voice from the cloud that overshadows the gathering reminding them and us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God's own chosen One. But the voice also says to them and us...*listen* to him. And while this experience changes all who are present, what is this lesson changing within us? What have we heard in the Gospel lessons that led us to this Transfiguration Sunday? Has there been a revelation of God in our lives that has led us to a transfiguration within ourselves? Are we listening to the Word of God, Jesus Christ, and what are we hearing?

So, as this Transfiguration scene before us in our Gospel lesson begins with prayer, an Epiphany prayer within *The Book of Common Prayer* prays that throughout the season of Epiphany, this light of Jesus Christ would lead us all to God's holy presence where we may behold God's glory face to face. And so, the Word of God is here today in the appointed Gospel lesson just as it has been over the last eight weeks of the Epiphany-tide...the voice of our Gospel lessons throughout the Epiphany-tide has brought us up to this lofty moment here at St. Paul Lutheran Church, amidst the glorious presence of God in Word and Sacrament, however, I ask once again, are we listening to what is before us and what are we hearing in it?

Our journey up this mountain began with the Feast Day of The Epiphany of our Lord. On this day we celebrate the "shinning forth" or the revelation of God coming to us in human form, in the person of Jesus Christ. The following week of our Epiphany journey we celebrated the Baptism of our Lord...but Jesus was not the only one to be Baptized that day. Jesus was Baptized after the crowd that had gathered were all Baptized. This worship day marked the beginning of the ministry of Jesus and confirmed the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. We heard on that day that the heavens were opened and the very same voice we hear today in our Gospel lesson, we heard at the Baptism of Jesus, telling us a very similar message,

"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22)

The following week of our journey through the Epiphany-tide, the revelation of God is heard in the miracle at the wedding at Cana. This miracle revealed the power of God's love in the actions of Jesus Christ in the midst of another gathering. In that miracle, we heard of God's power to change things and to do it all in an abundant way through the work of God's incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. This miracle revealed Christ's power to not only change water to wine, but to change our sin into His righteousness.

Our journey comes to the 3rd Sunday after the Epiphany with Jesus filled with the Holy Spirit and returning to Galilee to worship and teach in the synagogues. And just as he rolls up the scroll containing the words of the prophet Isaiah, Jesus lets the gathering know that the scripture is fulfilled in the gathering's hearing as well as our hearing, that day. And as we listened to the Gospel lesson, we heard that the Holy Spirit is the work and the presence of God and that the Holy Spirit is a central and vital presence, empowering Jesus throughout his ministry. But the Holy Spirit is not just a guide for Jesus, it is a reminder for us that the mission of Jesus Christ is directly connected to God's will. As we listened, we learned that the Holy Spirit is a crucial element not just for Jesus but also, for the disciples and us, enabling them and us to be faithful witnesses and spread the Gospel message to all nations.

The following week, as Jesus finishes teaching the gathering, they become filled with rage and they then want to throw Jesus off a cliff. But he passed through them and went on his way. Showing us all that there are some hearts that will not listen nor be changed. In this we are reminded that the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, is not heard by everyone gladly, some hear Jesus with resentment and anger and some hear him as a threat. But that does not shake Jesus.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus shows us the following week that because of the Holy Spirit, He remains a faithful witness and continues to spread His message. He then finds himself in the middle of another crowd gathered around him on the shore of the lake of Gennesaret. With the gathering on the shore of the lake, we see Jesus entering into the mundane reality of the lives of the crowd as well as some fisherman...who, the night before, are a bit unproductive as fisherman. Jesus meets them on the shore as they are going about the routine care and upkeep of their fishing nets. Jesus then sends them out to fish the very same waters they were unsuccessful in the night before. This time however, they are very successful, but no matter, they leave success behind and follow Jesus.

Within the Gospel lessons of last two Sundays of the Epiphany-tide we are amongst a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. As Jesus stands in the midst of all these categorized people from all these different places, we hear him preach four Beatitudes as well as the opposite of the Beatitudes or the anti-Beatitudes...woe to you. And just like the vast crowd around Jesus who were more than likely attempting to figure out whether they are blessed or cursed, so we too attempt to use our self-righteousness to maneuver ourselves into that "blessed category." And just as we think we have the "blessed am I" thing all figured out, we hear Jesus telling the crowds and *US* to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, pray for those who abuse us, if anyone should strike us on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away our coat do not withhold even your shirt. We are to give to everyone who begs from us, be merciful, do not judge, do not condemn, and forgive others. Simply put, Jesus tells them and us to: Do to others as you would have them do to you.

This journey through the appointed Epiphany Gospel lessons brings us to this mountain top experience in so many different ways. I reviewed these passages appointed for Epiphany because the entire point of them is to reveal the manifestation of God's will for us in Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world...a light that does not simply shine high on a mountain top, it shines here with us, shines in the crowds of diversity, and in the divisiveness of our culture today.

But I believe if we are totally honest with ourselves, we hear NOT what God is revealing to us in Jesus Christ, rather we hear what we need to do in light of what Jesus is teaching. We then ask ourselves, “What must I do,” or how can *my faith* take me to that majestic mountain top of glory away from all the muck and mire of this world and all the divisive hatred of our culture?

In all the glory of this mountain top experience we hear about today in our Gospel lesson, we like Peter, John, and James all in a sense want to build earthly dwellings with our good works inspired by all that we have heard and been taught by Jesus throughout our Epiphany journey. What we see first and foremost today is the dazzling glory and the cloud of divine protection, and in the words of God saying “This is my Son, *My chosen*”...this is what we want! We want that glory, we want to be chosen. We want to be a part of the elite few or the chosen few on that mountain top of glory. But are we really *listening* to what we are being taught by Jesus? Have we listened to where this teaching is taking place? Are we aware that our faith does not function in a vacuum, it is realized in the crowds of other around us.

I believe for some of us, we see our faith and our good works as a golden ticket of glory that places us higher than others in the world around us. And I’ll be honest, who doesn’t want to be in that divine glory? But keep in mind, to be in the presence of the holy is terrifying, it is very frightening. And that is the case here in this Transfiguration story before us today. We see glory and want it for ourselves, but we miss the fact that the ministry of Jesus does NOT happen on that mountain top. The real of glory of Jesus is seen in the grace and the mercy revealed down off the mountain and in the crowds of ordinary people.

We are shown the divine on the Mount of Transfiguration and just as we are shown this we are told to listen and then we are sent down the mountain in the midst of the brokenness and failure...which we are all a part of. Our call to discipleship is not done for OUR glory, it is done in the shadow of the cross. Our call to discipleship is NOT about building our pathway to glory, it is about taking up our cross and by that I mean, giving up ourselves, listening to how we can love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, pray for those who abuse us. Herein lies the glory of the Gospel today, to look and to see the transfiguration in others through the grace and mercy, we reveal just as Jesus has revealed it to us. But this is glory that we once again want to claim as our own when all we are doing is what we are called to do...and that is reveal God’s mercy and grace in a graceless age...but this is NOT the Good News for us today.

If we are listening or we have been listening throughout the Season of the Epiphany we will have heard or noticed that it is Jesus coming to the crowds, the gatherings, the people and not them working their way up to that mountain top of glory. The real glory, or the Good News is *down* on a level place just as it is today as Jesus comes down off the Mount to Transfiguration...just as it is here before us here in this gathering at St. Paul, in this proclaimed Word and in this Holy Meal that is set before us.

At the foot of the mountain Jesus and his disciples are confronted with the reality of the world once again in the midst of a great crowd. In that crowd we hear of the failure of the disciples to heal the child that is possessed by a demon. Jesus rebukes the unclean spirit, heals the boy, and gives him back to the father...here is the Good News for us today.

The Good News is not on a mountain top of glory, it's here at the foot of the mountain, on this level place where we are all healed by Jesus...and it is Jesus who gives us all back to the Father.

Our faith does not change our reality...we all fall short of the glory of God but it is Jesus who has come to us...who is with us...who despite our failures heals us all and gives us all back to God the Father.

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