

Sermons for the Journey

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Epiphany Last – Year B

Sunday, February 11, 2018

Have you ever been blessed with a mountain top experience like Peter, James, and John? Maybe you have had an extraordinary experience that has opened possibilities that you never even knew existed. Have you witnessed a miracle? Have you ever watched the birth of a child, heard the small still voice of God, experienced the beauty of God's creation, or been overwhelmed by the feeling of joy and peace? Have you ever felt the grief and pain of losing a loved one, but somehow found the strength and courage to persevere?

In today's Gospel Jesus was transfigured to a dazzling white. He has a conversation with Moses and Elijah in a Kingdom of God moment that can only be described as supernatural. Peter says, "Rabbi, it is good to be here." Peter is very confused, a cloud comes over, and a voice comes from heaven, "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!" When God's glory is revealed to us, it seems out of the realm of the ordinary and we often do not know what to make of it.

Many people who lose a beloved companion have shared with me that they sense their loved one's presence after they have passed. I hear stories all the time about the angels that people meet in their lives. Perhaps you have had a similar experience.

I remember well a particular evening when we lived in Ohio. We had just had our second daughter and moved to a beautiful new house, north of Cincinnati. Our bedroom and the nursery were on the second floor. We put our three children to bed and turned on the intercom in the baby's room. My wife and I watched a little TV and then went to sleep. In the middle of the night my wife was startled by headlights shining in our bedroom. Barb went to the window and realized that it would be impossible for headlights to shine through our bedroom because we were on the second floor and there were no cars on the street. Barb noticed that we could not hear our baby in the intercom and thought that the batteries had gone bad. When she reached into the crib she noticed that our daughter was choking and she reached into her mouth and took out a piece of padding that she had torn off and partially swallowed. The next morning my wife told me the story and I rushed into the nursery and found the foam that had been protecting her from the wooden crib was ripped. Until this day, both Barb and I believe that an angel woke her up in the middle of the night.

I have no definitive explanation to the occurrences on that night, but perhaps Isaiah can help us unpack this a little. "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to

the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:27-31).

I don't know why some people have God occurrences and others never seem to have any, but I suppose that God is difficult to find if we do not go looking. Are we listening to the Word of God and paying attention to the signposts on our road to eternal life? I believe that God is closer than you might imagine and that God leaves us many more signposts than we ever notice. God wants to help us on the path to eternal salvation, but we live in a cave, only able to see the shadows of the eternal, if we even notice them at all.

As we approach Lent, I ask you to change your habits just enough to see the shadow on the wall and to hear that still, small voice of God. In today's collect we pray, “O God who before the passion of your Son revealed his glory on the Holy Mount, that we may be strengthened to bear his cross.” God sustains us with an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus wants us to walk none other than the way of the cross and the way of the cross often begins in Lent. Lent is the time when we ponder the work that God has called us to do. We realize that the distractions of the world have kept us from God's purpose in our lives. If we want to be an authentic expression of Christ's light, we need to pray, study, listen, and make God the center of our world again.

We come together to give thanks and pray that we might recognize God in our midst and follow this path of healing and wholeness. In my experience, God is working in the life of our congregation in ways that we cannot ask for or imagine. Some of you have experienced prophetic voices, incarnational events, and brushes with angels. The point of this passage to me is that although we may not be able to see God, God is always near. When we love God with all our heart, mind and soul, we begin to see the edge of God's robe. When we truly listen to the Word of God, we are slowly transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ and the saints in heaven. Saints are folks like you and I that have walked this same path before us.

This past week we had two events with the racial reconciliation committee. On Thursday I heard the Diocesan Chair of that committee admit that some of us swim in the current all our lives and never even realize it, while others have to swim against the current all their lives. On Saturday, a group of us went to St. Augustine's in Brooklyn. The music stirred my heart. There was a steel drum band, sixty members in the choir, drums, electric bass and keyboards.

The sermon was about following in the footsteps of Absalom Jones. Do you know the story?

Absalom Jones was enslaved in 1746 in Delaware. He was exceptionally intelligent and was moved from the fields to the house. When his owner died and the owner's son sold

the plantation, Absalom moved to Philadelphia and married Mary Thomas who was also enslaved. He worked hard and purchased her freedom and eventually his own.

They worshiped at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church. He and his friend Richard Allen created the Free African Society that helped poor blacks and grew the black membership in the church. The black members worked hard to expand the church by building a balcony. The leadership decided to segregate the black members in that balcony. As Absalom was praying in church the next Sunday, he and all the black parishioners got a tap on the shoulder and were asked to sit in the balcony from then on. Absalom and the other black congregants left the church and formed St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Absalom was later ordained as the first black priest in the Episcopal Church.

If you have never been forced to sit in the back of the bus or in the balcony, never been singled out by a security guard in a store, you might want to have a conversation with someone who has. This is what the Holy Spirit is asking us to do at St. John's. Tell their stories and open the eyes of the blind. We start in a committee, spread our story to the congregation and Diocese, and then move into the greater community with a recognized National Speaker in the fall.

The preacher at the Absalom Jones service yesterday said that we have to stay and continue the work of Absalom Jones. I'm not exactly sure where we are headed, but I am confident that Jesus is here with us. So the next time you get a little frustrated by what is going on in our country, please remember, there are saints and angels in our midst and Moses, Elijah, and Jesus might be sitting there, right next to you. Amen.