

Epiphany IV 2016

Today is the last Sunday of Epiphany... the last Sunday for Alleluias in our liturgy for a while... the last Sunday before the season of Lent, the forty days of preparation for the passion of Jesus, and his resurrection, so this is one of those transitional points in our liturgical year... So it is time again to pause and take stock in what this faith of ours is about. The word Epiphany of course means revelation... and as we do at each last Sunday of Epiphany we read the gospel account of the so-called Transfiguration... This year, year C, we read Luke's account of Jesus going up the mountain with two of his disciples where they witness Jesus' appearance becoming dazzling white, aglow with the Spirit of God... and they hear a voice telling them that Jesus is the anointed one of God, and that they should listen to his voice.... For Luke, his entire gospel narrative is about the revelation of who this Jesus is... but in this story Luke seems to be pulling everything together... allowing his theological agenda to coalesce around one archetypal image.

So you remember Luke's thematic intentions that we've talked about: First, he is most intent on connecting the figure of Jesus to the prophetic tradition of the faith... Luke is not at all interested in forging a new-fangled religion... He wants to reinterpret Judaism for his own day and age... Jesus for Luke is nothing new, but a continuation of the true faith proclaimed by the tradition... So here in this reading Luke has Jesus appear with Moses and Elijah, the greatest of the Patriarchs speaking of "departure" which in the Greek reads *exodos*... Exodus. The life and ministry of Jesus is the new exodus for Luke... a new call to freedom. Luke is punching all the buttons of Judaism, drawing on orthodox typology. He has Jesus' face and clothing glowing white... just as Moses' face glowed when he was up on Mt. Sinai in the desert in the presence of God... This is a proclamation on authority... that Jesus bears the same authority for the people as did Moses and Elijah. This is my Son, my chosen one... listen to him.

And then the second theme... that the presence of the Spirit is apprehended through prayer... prayer, the artful practice of paying attention. Everything Jesus does in this gospel is accompanied by prayer... prayer being the means of living close to the truth... prayer not simply asking God for things... but prayer being about focused self-awareness, attending to one's imagination, seeking intently the good.

But what of the third theme... the theme of reversal... the revolutionary reconstitution of the world... the world about which Mary sings at the beginning of the narrative... a world wherein the social and economic hierarchy is turned upside down.... From a literary point of view, we have been predisposed by the writer to recognize this theme throughout the gospel... so where is it here? Let's look again at the text.... Jesus and his friends go up the mountain and have basically a religious experience... Mountains as you know are the place in antiquity where gods live... so if you want to find God, you climb a mountain... like Moses...start at the bottom... climb to the top. The disciples we are told are terrified... but actually the word is *awestruck*... so they immediately want to make memorials to mark the spot... you know, a 'selfie' to capture this mountaintop experience... They hear a voice saying this is my Son, listen to him... and they descend the mountain back to the crowds and back into the intensity of human commerce.... And this is where I think the reversal takes place.

The first thing that happens once Jesus and the disciples come down the mountain we are told, is that Jesus and his fellowship is accosted by a loud voice... a desperate father crying out for them to heal his epileptic son. It is a voice full of passion, and urgency, and love. A voice gilded with authority. Jesus then heals the boy... and we are told that all were awestruck... the same word as the word on the mountain... awestruck at the greatness of God.

So here it is... the glory and majesty of God is not up on the mountain, nor, for that matter, is it up there on the Altars in the sanctuaries of churches... For millennia, God has been at the top of the cosmological pyramid... God up there... and all of us down here... some lower than others... reflective in fact of the social and economic hierarchy of our world... For some reason it is in the human DNA, at least as long as recorded history, that the powerful and privileged occupy the top spot and the rest descend along the socio-economic scale... a social order that is vertical... top down. That cosmic and social paradigm is being undone here... The voice of God is not reserved only for the rarefied air of the mountaintop... The voice of God now is the voice of the father crying out for his afflicted son... It is not a voice from the top, from the lofty precincts of the heavens... but it is a cry from the underside, from the wounded of the world.

The voice of God is the voice of the poor and the diseased and the disenfranchised, and the people who fear for their lives... The voice of God cries out for wholeness and dignity and worth... the voice of God is calling out for love and liberation... We have been taught to listen in the wrong places... the voice of

God does not boom from the heavens in triumphal reverie... the voice of God is a voice of passionate advocacy for the ones who are left out.... The voice of God is for those who have no voice... and the voice is resonant with passion and urgency and love.

So brothers and sisters we dare not listen towards the climes of heaven for a fleeting word from the almighty... We only have to listen to the world around us for the voice that bears the authority of the one who made all that there is... The story of Jesus is not about Jesus... The story of Jesus is about the greatness of God... God who speaks with persistent advocacy for our brothers and sisters enslaved by the structures of our world that oppress and abase.... This is a God who lives and moves among us... a God come down from the mountain to bring jubilee... the year of God's favor.

All of us bear God's voice... all of us as people of faith speak with the authority of God... because we are made to love, and there is no greater authority on earth than love... In our baptisms we have been given to a life-long vocation of compassion and advocacy to bring God's gracious favor to the world around us... These are our brothers and sisters, our sons and daughters, the chosen... listen to their voice... hear them and love them, and be awestruck by the greatness of God.