

Epiphany VI Year C

O God, Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us.

When our son James moved out to Austin to live with us after quitting school...I told him a few days after he arrived that there were two kinds of status in our household...that of student and that of employed...James did not fall into the former classification...so he had to look for a job....He found one after a couple of weeks at a popular Italian style bistro on the west side of town as a line cook...he had no experience other than telling them that his parents loved to cook...they liked him and they hired him....He liked the job for what little he knew of it... but after about two weeks he called in sick having been out late the night before....and then a few days later, he called in sick again....and the chef told him he need not come back... I was just about on my way to class when he got the news...He sat on his bed dejected, and I asked him what he was going to do...He sat and thought, and finally he stood up to his full height, his face now animated, as if a light illuminated...and he said I'm going to get dressed and go see the chef and talk her into giving me my job back...and that's what he did...and she did give him his job back...and he knew then and there that food would be his career...that was nine years ago and he loves it still....but at that moment of truth I saw him grow up...I saw a coming of age...I saw him claim the calling that was his, claim his identity, and I saw him muster the will to live into it...the truth of the matter was palpable, glowing, present... a transfiguration dare I say.

Our gospel reading for today is a moment of truth for Luke. Here in the account of the so-called transfiguration, Luke defines the culmination of what has come before in this gospel as to Jesus' identity, and it will foreshadow that which comes after...We have heard of Jesus' birth and baptism...we have heard of the coming new social and economic order in Mary's song...and from the child Jesus reading from the scroll of Isaiah proclaiming "the release of the captives"...We have heard of Jesus' prowess as teacher, preacher and healer...of his feeding the masses...and now Luke states, raising the stakes, that Jesus belongs in the company of Moses and Elijah...representatives of the very Law and the Prophets...along with Abraham, two principal fathers, archetypes of the faith ... Moses, spoke with God face to face... Elijah, was carried from earth into heaven in a fiery chariot...In other words, Jesus is the Type....Jesus the type that has forever stood for Israel's liberation...he, like the ones come before, driven by the

Spirit, now he the bearer of the face of God and the bearer of the truth... This is Jesus' coming of age... We are told that this extravagant vision began with prayer, prayer very important to Luke:... the disciples we are told were nodding off to sleep until they awakened in prayerful reverie to see this vision of the truth... sleep here being the faithless counterpart to vision... prayer then the means to keep awake to the truth... prayer the enlightened art of paying attention... so with that definition prayer becomes much more than a few formal words spoken to God ... it becomes lifestyle... It becomes practice... It includes our conscious actions... In our work and study and worship and our play... It becomes a way of life in which we practice the art of seeing the truth all around us... and it is collaborative... a way of seeing God's hand at work about us... It is there to be sure.... Ours, together, is to see it and act upon it... Through prayer we see.

Luke is making theological statements here... not historical statements but theological; he is drawing from the sacred lore of Israel... This is the one, Luke argues, the anointed of God, the one come of age... and we've seen this before... this is history repeating itself, as history does, come round again glowing with the truth... that God is a God who forever liberates, and God does it within our very history... Out of slavery in Egypt; from the desert of Sinai... during the darkest days of the monarchy... from exile in Babylon... from the oppressive Assyrians... God comes to inhabit God's people, as one among us, and wields heart and hand for the great good that awaits ever so tenuously, but surely... that we would but awaken and see our own transfiguration as the chosen to bear God's work in the world... This is the same story told throughout the whole of so-called Old and New Testament literature... That God loves through us, that the truth of God glows among us enlightening the darkness... It has forever been and will forever be so.

So on the one hand Luke paints us a picture of who this Jesus is... and therefore who the people of faith are... and then Luke tells us what Jesus does... and therefore what we are called to do.

Luke is editing Mark here. In Mark, when Peter James and John see Jesus conversing with Moses and Elijah, we are not told anything about that conversation... In Luke, however, we are... and it is critical for our understanding of Luke's theology... Luke tells us that they, Jesus, Moses and Elijah are discussing Jesus' coming "departure"... certainly that has to do with his coming crucifixion... but there's more... departure is the word used by the New Revised Standard version... the translation we use in all our readings... and the word for departure in the Greek... is ἐξοδος (EXODOS)... so of course the audience would think of the exodus from

Egypt...here history repeating itself...the cycle, as it were, of liberation come round again at last...the new Exodus...Jesus the new, the renewed manifestation of the liberation bringer whom those of faith would follow in his way of kindness and hospitality and peacemaking, and healing and in calling out injustice....Jesus the manifestation of God's ways in earth... history revealed again as a chronicle of God in Mission with us and through us...Mission, that for which we are born, mission, acting for the good of the whole, our true glowing humanity....so it is Exodus, liberation that Jesus is about according to Luke.

Luke has spoken already of a coming new social economic and political order in which the poor are raised up and corrupted power cast down, a new world of dignity for all....that is salvation for Luke....but up and against that good news is a tension ...a tension that Luke sets up earlier in the fourth chapter....There, Jesus is tempted by Satan...Satan being the personification of structural evil, of the corrupt status quo...with implications towards Imperial rule itself...but Satan not only tempts Jesus... Satan taunts him that he, Satan, in truth is the ruler of earth...and then only after Jesus' rebuke he departs...departs until an opportune time the text reads....we'll see him again, and soon.

So Luke sets up a cosmic conflict between the powers of evil and the power of good...the powers of darkness up and against the powers of light and truth...Jesus, Elijah and Moses and those who follow...the critical mass of Israel's history and faith...have come together for the last battle... and it is a battle for liberation.

The first thing Jesus does after this visionary experience on the mountain is exorcise an evil spirit from a young boy, at an "opportune time"... he liberates him from indignity...liberates him from pain and suffering...restores him to his family...liberated from the margins of existence...In every story of healing, in every deed of power performed by Jesus... one may read it as a story of liberation...a story of exodus.... liberation from that which binds...from that which oppresses...from fear, liberation from that which keeps us from wholeness...liberation from that which denies our true humanity.

So what we have here is an expanded, or even reversed version of the Aristotelian vision of the enlightened human ascending towards peace and happiness... because here the enlightened *descend* the mountain back into the lost corners of the world bearing freedom for the marginalized from the world's evil....and this enlightened freedom begins one child at a time.... Begins with one of the hungry fed at a time... this enlightened freedom begins with one of the degraded granted dignity, one at a time....liberation

begins with one treaty of peace...this good come down from heaven begins again...this good that transfigures us into prayerful action...this good is already overcoming that which would boast of a dark lordship...Brothers and sisters it is we now who glow with this light of liberation...It is we who have the power now, driven by the Spirit, to descend the mountain of God's gracious favor into the broken and captive and besieged world God so passionately loves...as Spirit driven liberators...It is for us in this moment of truth...the appearance of our faces graciously changed...It is for us in this moment of truth to come of age...for us to stand tall in the beauty of our humanity, which is to stand tall in the divine life, transfigured, amid the abundant life God wills for our world...this is our claim to our true identity, our true calling...come of age at last, and dazzling...and all will be astounded at the greatness of God.