

Epiphany VI Year C

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

There was a day in September when I was a middler at seminary when my son James called me and told me that he had quit school. He said that he wanted to continue playing in his band.... The others in the band had graduated and were all moving to Asheville North Carolina, and he wanted to go with them...I was of course crushed...I tried to talk him out of it, but he had already withdrawn...I told him that I was really upset, but that there was also a part of me that knew that one must follow one's passion...I told him that too.....that was the only solace I could muster.

After about a year and a half one of the band members got married and the band split up...James moved out to Austin with us...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...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 that food would be his career... 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.

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 from Mary...and from the child Jesus reading Isaiah, "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...the two principal fathers of the faith following Abraham...One, Moses, spoke with God face to face...and the other, 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 salvation...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...We are told that this extravagant vision began with prayer, prayer very important to Luke...so a brief excurses here on prayer:...the disciples we are told were nodding off to sleep until they awakened in prayerful reverie to see this vision of the truth....sleep 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 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 is to see it and act upon it...Through prayer the disciples see.

Now scholars for centuries have stayed up late into the night trying to figure out what might have happened to produce this dramatic narrative of the Transfiguration...was this a misplaced resurrection account...which mountain did it happen upon...but all that is beside the point because Luke is making theological statements here...not historical but theological....This is the one, Luke argues, the anointed of God, 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 saves, and God does it within our very history...Out of slavery in Egypt; in the desert of Sinai...during the darkest days of the monarchy...Even from exile in Babylon...God comes round among us, as one among us, and wields God's hand for the great good that awaits ever so tenuously, but surely...that we would but awake and see God's hand at work among us...This is the same story told throughout the whole of so-called Old and New Testament literature...That God loves among 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 church is...who the people of God are...and then Luke tells us what Jesus does...We've had examples in previous chapters...but here Luke is explicit as to the means of this coming new order, the way of the Christ.

We remember that both Matthew and Luke are using Mark as their primary source material for the writing of their gospels...Mark's gospel being the earliest written...If you read many of the passages in Luke and Matthew alongside Mark...you can readily see where they edit Mark...for example, Luke adds resurrection appearances to Mark...Luke adds the story of the good Samaritan... Luke chooses to begin his gospel with Jesus' birth and his genealogy...whereas Mark begins with baptism...and our passage today is no exception...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"... departure is the word used by the New Revised Standard version... the translation we use in all our readings... but the word 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 salvation come round again at last... the new Exodus... the promised freedom... Jesus the new, the renewed manifestation of it and those who will 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... God's hand about us... history revealed again as a chronicle of God in Mission with us and through us... Mission, that for which we are born, that, our true humanity... so it is Exodus that Jesus is about according to Luke... Jesus principally concerned with liberation... so, Exodus from what... liberation from what?

Amid the principal themes of this Gospel that I spoke of a couple of weeks ago... namely the theme of 1) a coming new order, the reversal of fortune motif... 2) the driving force of the Spirit... every action in Luke is driven by the Spirit... and then 3) the importance of Jesus being in the line and stature of the great prophets... woven amid these themes is a tension, an important 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 another 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 the truth... the powers of darkness up and against the powers of light... and in Luke's theology it is liberation that will become the chief means of winning the great good against such evil promised from the beginning by our God... Jesus, Elijah and Moses... the critical mass of Israel's history and faith... have come together for the last battle... and it is a battle for liberation... So let's follow the text:

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... 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 moving upwards toward happiness... Aristotle believed that humankind was endowed with the good, but

must strive to discover and enact it... but here the enlightened *descend* the mountain into the margins of the world bearing freedom 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 shown dignity, one at a time...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, the abundant life God wills for our world...this 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.