

Last Sunday after the Epiphany
February 25, 2017
The Rev. Jamie Samilio

And then it happened.

Good Morning, as Peter says in the Gospel today, "...it is good for us to be here!" Gathering together once a year to worship as one body and to look back at the past year, and think forward to the months to come is healthy, and helps strengthen us as disciples.

Just prior to this Gospel—six days prior to be exact, Jesus had told Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" And the disciples were told to set their minds on divine things, and not human. They were told that the Son of Man would come with angels in all his glory and will repay everyone for what has been done. Jesus told them that some of them would not live to see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom—apparently this was happening soon.

I want to focus with you on today's Gospel. To do this, let's take a moment to clear our minds, breathe and imagine being invited to join Jesus, Peter, James, and John on the mountain. Picture the scene and put yourself on the top of the mountain with Jesus. Can you imagine what that might have been like, to be one of the disciples that Jesus chose to go off alone with on a trek up a mountain? I imagine it feels a lot like when your boss or someone you admire invites you into a high-level meeting or to do something special.

What is clear for me in this mountain top scene is the humanity of the disciples, especially Peter. Like us, I think the disciples heard what they wanted to hear, heard only what they could wrap their minds around.

If you read the Gospel, study and think about it, it is pretty clear that the disciples, right up to the end, did not fully understand what the plan was—think a few weeks forward when they will ask, "When will we ride into Jerusalem?" They are trying to imagine what the kingdom will be like—and this is important—just like us, they wanted to know where they fit in.

Let's go back to the scene from the Gospel today. I imagine that Peter, James, and John might be thinking things like, "I bet Jesus brought us up here to decide who will sit on His right and left in the coming Kingdom—just last week He said it would be soon!" Did they ponder who would get to be in charge of the others while two will sit with Jesus? How good will it be, holding court over people? Jesus told them a few days before "...and he will repay everyone for what has been done before." And, the kingdom will be here before some of them "taste death," this is happening soon people, this mountain trek must be the planning meeting!

And then it happens. Jesus was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. They had heard about this in the scriptures of Exodus about Moses—and poof, all of a sudden there stand not only Moses, representing the law, but Elijah as well, representing the prophets.

OK, remember, you are still standing there with them...what would you think? What would you say or do? The scene was surreal to say the least.

I love Peter. Peter to me represents the humanity in all of us. He often speaks without thinking things through, but his heart is always in the right place. Here he is standing with

Moses and Elijah—perhaps a little disappointed, who wouldn't be, I imagine he is thinking that it must be these two who will sit at the right and left of “King” Jesus, and for sure they are more worthy than Peter, James, John or any of us, right? So, Peter blurts out, “Lord is it good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” As if to say, “Hey, wow, what an honor to meet you, did not think we would be meeting you like this. Uh, let me make some shelters as is our tradition for you and our honored guests—because that is what we have always done. And then, well, I have no idea after that.” The Rev. Luis Leon, says that people have an “edifice” complex. We want to hang onto moments and memories so much that we build buildings to commemorate them. But what we are really called to do is to act on what we experience, and know in our hearts. Peter knows what he knows, and does what he does, the way he has always done it. But even Peter learns to transform. Back to the scene...

Before Peter finishes speaking, this happens. A cloud spreads over them and the voice of God thunders, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” This voice and these words were heard at Jesus' Baptism—this is real! Peter, James, and John lose it and fall to the ground in fear.

Jesus touches them, tells them not to be afraid, and poof, they realize they are there alone with Jesus. Are you still there with them? Are you wondering if there was something in the water? Are you questioning what just happened? Jesus tells them not to tell anyone what they experienced until he has been raised from the dead. I am not sure those words were helpful in the moment either. Standing in the scene myself, I would have to recap: Jesus lights up like a shining star, I see Moses and Elijah—long dead, a cloud covers us, the voice of God heard once before tells me Jesus is God's son and I need to listen to Him, we all pass out, and Jesus is now waking us up. As we start back down the mountain, Jesus tells us that what happened on the mountain top, stays on the mountain top—until after he dies and comes back to life.

No problem, who would I tell, and where would I even begin? People would think I lost it. (Ok, some of you may think that anyway.)

It is 2017, and I know this all happened, and I have a hard time wrapping my mind around it. I cannot imagine how the disciples felt—how would you feel? What would you think?

Let's unpack this just a little. Moses and Elijah represent the law and the prophets, and Jesus said he came to fulfill the law and the prophets. What would the world be like if we did as God commanded and listened to Him? Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and love your neighbor as yourself. On these two things hang all the law and the prophets.” Does that sound like the core of the Gospel message to you? It rings true to me.

Transfiguration—to be transformed, to change, and in this case to reveal the divine form of Jesus—this is the meaning of transfiguration at its core, to be transformed or changed.

It is not just one person who changed the world in which Jesus lived—it was the community. Transformation is a communal effort, and the transformation process looks at what happened before, what's happening in the moment, and what is to come. We can set up change, but the change happens in the community when we show up. Transformation or change happens when we become willing to accept that all things are not reliant on only our human experience and abilities, because we are not alone. Peter, James, and John were the witnesses to the transfiguration, and what they did after witnessing it transformed the church.

The Holy Cross branch of the Body of Christ is also in a state of transformation. And again, transformation is a communal effort, it takes all of us to show up.

In many ways over the past year, we have set up change, but the change only happens in the community when we show up. What if we become willing to accept our call to embrace change? What would our parish look like if, though our relationships with each other, parish partners, the community, and the Diocese, we worked together to transform Holy Cross and the world? I think that amazing things happen when we move from what we can do within our personal limits, and instead work in relationship with God and each other.

What would Holy Cross be like if we did as God commanded and listened to Jesus—loved God and our neighbors? What if we made these two great commandments central to our ministry in deepening our roots, broadening our reach, and increasing our spiritual growth?

My sister has a saying that she uses to encourage me when I try to make changes and transform my life. “If it is to be, it is up to me.” This is what she tells me to repeat if I become discouraged, it presses me forward and empowers me.

So I say, Good morning Holy Cross, it is good for us to be here. If it is to be, it is up to us. Because, what we do, matters. Amen

Bonus

Believe me, I know
how tempting it is
to remain inside this blessing,
to linger where everything
is dazzling and clear.
We could build walls
around this blessing,
put a roof over it.
We could bring in a table, chairs,
have the most amazing meals.
We could make a home.
We could stay.
But this blessing is built for leaving.
This blessing is made for coming down
the mountain.
This blessing wants to be in motion,
to travel with you
as you return to level ground.
It will seem strange
how quiet this blessing becomes
when it returns to earth.
It is not shy.
It is not afraid.
It simply knows
how to bide its time,
to watch and wait,
to discern and pray

until the moment comes
when it will reveal
everything it knows,
when it will shine forth
with all it has seen,
when it will dazzle
with the unforgettable light
you have carried
all this way.

(Dazzling by Jan Richardson, from “Circle of Grace”)