

Last Sunday after the Epiphany – Year B – The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony 2.14.21

2 Kings 2:1-12, Psalm 50:1-6, 2 Corinthians 4:3-6, Mark 9:2-9

The earliest converts to Christianity when they read the Scripture or more probably heard the scriptures read to them, were not interested in academic study. They were looking for the clues about how God wanted them to live in the world. They were interested in how their lives paralleled the lives of the disciples. And so, there developed a form of scripture reading known by the Latin name *Lectio Divina*, holy reading. This was not reading for information or for historical accuracy but rather listening for the voice of God found in the words heard.

There is a difference between hearing and listening. How often does someone hear the words spoken but fails to listen to what is being said? In *lectio divina*, the object is not only to hear but to truly listen, to take into our hearts and meditate on what we have heard. It is expected that the meditation will lead to a change in the way we act, and thus to a closer relationship with God.

While he would not have called it *lectio divina*, this was the lesson that Jesus was teaching Peter, James and John, on the mountain that day. The three disciples who formed the inner core of the Twelve, went up the mountain with Jesus not knowing what to expect. But their experience would equip them to become not only hearers of God's word but doers of the word as well.

It had been a trying few weeks since the three had left their fishing boats, their nets and their families to follow this young rabbi. During that time Jesus had gathered large crowds of people, mostly those who were poor, uneducated and especially oppressed by the Roman overlords. There were a great many of them who came to listen to the parables, to be healed, and to see the miracles that Jesus would do. They were hoping that this Rabbi was truly sent from God to make their lives better. Jesus had fed 5,000, walked on water, encountered opposition from those in power, the Pharisees and others who were invested in keeping the status quo. There had been tense times, and now, just a short time ago, Jesus whom they followed had told them of the manner in which he would die. They heard but they did not want to listen.

Peter, James and John were anxious, confused as to who this Jesus really was. Was he the promised Messiah? He acted like a messiah but then again he did not plan to overthrow the Romans. He spoke of the power of God but seemed to think that power was in loving God and loving neighbor. Yet, the three, when invited by Jesus to join him at the top of Mount Tabor, were willing to go.

In your spiritual life, have you ever had doubts? Have you ever wondered exactly who this Jesus that you follow, who he was really? Was he the Son of God, was he the Jewish Messiah? Can you understand what James, John and Peter were feeling as they climbed Mount Tabor? Doubts are not the opposite of faith. Doubts are part of faith and questioning is the way in which our faith grows and matures.

Peter, James and John were about to have an experience that would expand their spiritual understanding and cement their allegiance to Jesus. They are going to hear the voice of God telling them who Jesus is, the Son, the Beloved.

God only speaks twice in the Gospels. Speaks to make clear that Jesus is God's Son, the Messiah, the one long expected to come into the world. The two occasions are the Baptism of Jesus and this time, the Transfiguration.

Jesus to begin his ministry goes to the River Jordan and is baptized by John. On that day as Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending like a dove. A voice, the voice of God came from heaven saying "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." In some sense this is the introduction of Jesus to the world. Clearly this is someone who is unique.

What does it mean to us today to hear these words? What does it mean that Jesus is the Son of God? Each Christian answers that question for themselves. The answer becomes their personal theology. Is Jesus the healer, the miracle worker, the teacher, the preacher, the one to whom we turn in prayer. Is Jesus all of these things and more?

Peter, James and John were not present or at least there is no record of their being present on the banks of the Jordan when Jesus was baptized? They were far away to the north on the Sea of Galilee leading their lives, good and faithful Jews, trying to survive. They did not hear the voice of God on that first occasion. But others did, many others, crowds who came out from Jerusalem to experience John's baptism. Can you imagine yourself as part of that crowd at the River Jordan? What did you come out to see? What would be your response to the descent of the Spirit and the voice of God?

Many weeks later, after having spent time with Jesus, Peter, James and John find themselves on the mountain top with him. They do not know why they are there but they have come because Jesus asked it of them. Then an unexpected, an amazing thing happened. God entered the story to make visible what has been hidden to this point. Jesus' clothes became dazzling white, bright enough for the three to see with new eyes what is before them.

There are other assurances that this is real, that this is of God. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appear, they who were the first and last prophets of Israel through whom God had spoken. The cloud that overshadows Peter and the others reminds the three of the cloud in the wilderness that guided the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land. God was in the cloud by day and fire by night and God never left them. And finally they hear the voice of God "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him! Not just hear the voice of God but listen really listen. Listening in this context means not only taking something in with one's mind but further, meditating, praying on what one has heard and then acting. When we hear the voice of God in our lives we are not to stop, but to act on what we have come to know as God's invitation to us.

Peter does not quite understand. He would like to stay on the mountaintop, building booths so that Jesus, Elijah and Moses can remain with the three disciples. He wants to stay in this place where he has listened to the voice of God. But Jesus will not allow that. The gift of hearing the voice of God is to be shared with the world and that means going down from the mountain to the place where the world resides. Peter, James and John had been empowered by God on that mountain top and their lives were forever changed. Can you imagine yourself on that mountain top and can you imagine hearing the voice of God?

Peter, James and John accompanied Jesus back down the mountain to rejoin those they had left at the bottom. Things were different and also the same. That is what transfiguration is all about, we become different through the experience but still are in many ways the same. Peter, James and John continued to wonder, question and ask for the impossible. Each in their own way, they denied Jesus. They were in a word human. But they followed in the best way they could, and they were forgiven, renewed and strengthened to become the apostles on whom the Church was built. They were not perfect but they tried to live the spiritual lessons they learned on that mountain top. And always they knew that God was with them.

They would have understood the words of St. Benedict centuries later. "Always we begin again." Words for us today as well. On this last Sunday before we begin our Lenten journey, I invite you to consider how you will "begin again."