

The Transfiguration, Yr B; August 6, 2006. Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1:13-21; Luke 9:28-36

The master was exceedingly gracious to university dons who visited him, but he would never reply to their questions or be drawn into their theological speculations. To his disciples that marveled at this he said, “Can one talk about the ocean to a frog in a well—or about the Divine to people who are restricted by their concepts?”

In our reading today we see Jesus remove the frogs from the well and take them to see the ocean. Jesus takes his disciples on retreat to see the Divine; literally...Jesus wants to change the concepts of the disciples by giving them witness to the greater truth of God...

Jesus had been working with the disciples for some time when this event occurs. He has been teaching, healing and living among the people of the first century when he invites Peter, James, and John to accompany him to the HIGH mountain. Now a mountain was understood to be the highest place on earth, that place where the human and the Divine are the closest they will be in this life. A place where the human and the Divine literally touch.

Why did Jesus take these three fellows with him on this trip? Well it would seem that we can speculate on all of the creative mysticism we can think of and still give an inadequate description of why this scene is one of the greatest stories we hear in Scripture. Let's attempt to talk through this and see if we too can encounter the Holy on our Mountain today.

In the Ten Commandments God required we keep the Sabbath Holy. God didn't make this commandment because God needs rest. God gave us this commandment because we need rest. One of the benefits of the Sabbath was that it rendered everyone, rich and poor, equal. No matter what your social or economic status, you were given this day without work. Another reason for the Sabbath was to be able to have the day, not only to worship, but to reflect on how you had served God in the week past. This understanding is still present in the utilization of the Sabbatical year given by the church for their clergy. This is time to reflect on the ministry to which you have been called and the way in which that ministry has affected those whom you serve and how it has affected you as pastor. A time to reflect and a time to expand your learning based on what it is you understand you might need to know for the work that is still ahead of you. It is a time when the frog is again taken to the ocean. A time when we are urged to look at the concepts that keep us where we are. Concepts that keep us from experiencing the things that God may have in store for us.

So Jesus takes his disciples to the mountaintop to take Sabbath time; a Holy time when they will encounter the Divine in a profound and memorable way. A time when they will receive the nourishment of their spirits to equip them for the work that is ahead, the tragedy that is ahead, and the triumph that is ahead.

When you and I attempt to do what we understand might be the will of God without first seeking spiritual refreshment to our souls, we often tire before the tasks are complete. It is in times like these that we often get confused by what it is that we are being called to do, and consequently we are subject to the pitfalls of poor planning. We can end up in the same trap that nabbed poor Peter. We become the victims of our own concepts. We are imprisoned by what we think we should do. Peter thought he

should build dwellings for Jesus, Elijah and Moses. He thought the way to preserve what he was witnessing was to entrap it, to enshrine it. He opted for the institutions that we have become so accustomed to. He rendered his quick opinion to what it was that he THOUGHT God was calling him to. God's response is swift and sure. It is almost as if you can see God thinking, Peter, Peter, Peter, you just don't get it... No Peter, you are not to envelop me in your concepts, I will envelop and surround you and I will fill you with the spirit and wisdom and courage and all of the things you need to do my work in the world. But first, you are here on this Holy mountain to experience me... And OH! By the way, this man who you have been hanging out with for all this time, who has tried to tell you time and again, who he is, I now want you to know, this is my SON, he comes with my will for you...LISTEN to him..

The concepts of the disciples were changed in this Transfiguration. The concepts they had been taught by the keepers of the law, the institutions of their day, were now being brought to scrutiny. They came face to face with direct knowledge that their friend Jesus is the Son of God. It reminds me of the Zen disciple who was overly respectful of his Zen Master, and the master told him "Light is reflected on the wall, why venerate the wall? Be attentive to the light."

Peter, James and John and the rest of society at that time had been taught by those they thought had all of the answers. They began to value their status and expertise more than they valued what it was they were to be learning from the Scripture. They were venerating the religious leaders and the laws. Jesus appeared intentionally with Moses and Elijah; He didn't appear with Aaron, the priest of the synagogue, or David the King, he didn't appear with the institutional representatives of the law and the state, he appeared with the Godly ones, he appeared with the one who carried the laws of God and the one who bore the prophetic voice. He appeared with the Holy ones of God. These fortunate disciples were given a glimpse of the Divine on that mountain that day. This glimpse would be what they needed to be able to make the trip back down the mountain to God's people below who are in need of healing, who are in need of love, who are in need of an encounter with the Holy themselves.

That my friends is why we come to worship on Sunday, we come to the mountain that will give us the spirit to do God's work in the world. We come to encounter the Holy through Eucharist, and through each other. Let's not be frogs in a well, only able to see as far as the darkness that surrounds us will allow, let's be frogs on the beach, the ones who have been transfigured by the love of God, ones who have seen the miraculous effects of an encounter with the Christ. We then can share the ocean, because we would have experienced it. Let's not limit God's power because of our own minimal vision—let's journey up the mountain, trusting that God will reveal to us what God needs to have revealed. Let's get excited about expanding our concepts and widening our understandings. Let's pray for courage, let's pray that we are blessed enough to have an encounter with the Holy. Let us remember that Jesus is the light to which we are to be attentive.

Amen