

**Last Epiphany  
February 11, 2018**

**In the name of the God of all Creation.  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

I know it may be hard to believe, but we begin Lent this week with Ash Wednesday. Today is the Last Sunday of our Epiphany Season. Among the definitions of the word “epiphany” are “disclosure,” “manifestation,” “unveiling,” and “appearance.” The reading from Mark’s gospel this morning is certainly an epiphany ... complete with a blinding light, a heavenly voice, and visions of Elijah and Moses.

This year there were only six weeks in the Church’s season of Epiphany. That was just long enough to get a good look at Jesus and think about who this baby, born in a manger, might really be. Was he a prophet, an itinerant rabbi, a son of God like the Caesars, was he divine or human, or was he something altogether different? The truth is that followers of Jesus have been arguing about this for as long as we’ve had a religion. When one view or another gains ascendancy the other views become heresies.

The truth is that we do not know the true nature of Jesus any more than we can grasp the nature of the God who somehow made him and sent him. Oh, sure, we can all state the orthodox position. But, I think a lot of us wonder. And that’s OK. We are here to be in love with God, not to understand God.

Still, we learned some things during Epiphany. On the first Sunday after the Epiphany ... with the story of the Three Wise Men ... we invited to think about the gifts we have received and the gifts we might offer back to God. We saw that God is not that interested in sacrifice. What he really wants is our broken spirits and contrite hearts.

By the time we got to the second Sunday after the Epiphany Jesus had been claimed in baptism, and he immediately started claiming others. He called his first four followers and they entered into a wild world of unknown adventures and we saw that we might be in for a wild ride too.

On the third Sunday after the Epiphany, we went on a different kind of fishing trip and learned that whatever comes to us in the nets of life, Jesus is with us. We can’t see what’s down in the depths, but we can raise it up and get a good look at things. We don’t have to handle the sea creatures of life alone, we just have to keep fishing.

Then things got really exciting as we read about demon possession! One of the demons we have to cast out is the demon of the status quo or going along to get along. And again, we see

that Jesus is with us, and he has power over demons too. The light shined and we started to get a good look at this Christmas baby.

On the fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, we noticed that Jesus likes to hold hands. He is with us, he has power over demons, and he reaches out, connects, and holds our hands. If he is a God, then he is clearly a God with a body. He touches... And we have learned a little more about Jesus.

This season of Epiphany began with the celebration of the Wise Men honoring the baby Jesus, followed by Jesus' baptism by John in the River Jordan. As Jesus came up out of the water there was voice from heaven "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." This morning ... on the Last Sunday of our Epiphany season ... we heard those words again, this time on a mountain and coming out of a cloud in what is called the Transfiguration. Baptism at the beginning, Transfiguration at the end ... these are the bookends of the Church's season of Epiphany.

Another definition of the word "epiphany" is: "a sudden realization ... a sudden intuitive leap of understanding, especially through an ordinary but striking occurrence." It is one thing to listen to these stories about Jesus that we have heard over these last eight weeks as a testament to his divinity. It is another to ask how this "Epiphany" might be true and real in our own lives ... right now ... today. What do we know of living a transformed life?

Peter and James and John went up the mountain and saw Jesus transfigured. They saw the meaning of what it meant to be the Messiah. They saw robes dazzling white, beyond human comprehension. And standing next to Jesus they saw Moses and Elijah. The prophet Elijah was the archetype of what it meant to be a prophet and proclaim God's justice to the world. On the other side of Jesus they saw the archetype of God's law. The Kingdom of God would be a world where God's law would reign; where everyone would be in right relationship with God, with each other, and with all of God's creation. Moses was the ultimate lawgiver ... Elijah the prophet of justice. And Jesus, the Messiah, standing between Moses and Elijah, was the fulfillment of both.

When Peter saw this he was dumbfounded. Of course the impetuous and impulsive Peter, who was never at a loss for words, blurted out that they should make three tabernacles ... three booths ... three shrines ... one for Jesus, one for Elijah, and one for Moses. Peter fell for the temptation to concretize the experience. This mystical event obviously terrified Peter and James and John. And concretizing such an experience is the same temptation that we, all too often, fall into. I believe we would rather worship Jesus the Christ in beautiful buildings and with wonderful liturgy ... a way of literally and figuratively concretizing the experience of Jesus ... rather than to take seriously what Jesus took seriously ... that is, to actively participating in God's Kingdom ... to live a transformed life.

The Transfiguration of Jesus was certainly a mystical mountaintop experience. For Peter, James and John it was both frightening and it filled them with incredible awe. But the experience began to answer the question of what being the "Messiah" may have been for Jesus ... the

fullness of the incarnation of God's justice and rightness with God and God's creation. And it becomes for us a path to living in God's Kingdom today ... to live a transformed life. If this means anything at all it means bringing God's justice to the world we live in, and living in a right relationship with God, with each other and all humanity, and with all of God's creation.

However, a transformed life is not life as usual. Learning to see in new ways is one of the most difficult tasks of the transformed life. Old habits of selective vision, old choices about what to leave out and what to focus on tend to dominate us, even as we search for new ways of living a transformed life ... a life that is in closer communion with the life of God's Spirit.

Transfiguration ... that mysterious transformation of vision that is narrated in today's readings ... is a radical, if brief, way of seeing.

Jesus was the Incarnation of God in this world. Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom of God ... a world as it would be if God reigned in every heart and soul, and in every community and nation. Two thousand years later we stand as the Church in the name of Jesus. If we are to be God incarnate in our own time ... and live a transformed life ... then we too have to proclaim by word and example God's justice ... and we have to proclaim by word and example what it means to be in right relationship with God, with each other, and with God's creation.

We are called to welcome the stranger, to include the marginalized, to feed the hungry, and to empower the disenfranchised. We are called to go beyond mere words and into action ... to take seriously those things that Jesus took seriously. It may mean sacrificing our own security for the sake of another but we do it in the faith that the one who lost his life for us also rose to new life.

As we end this season of Epiphany, and move to the Church's season of Lent in preparation for the Resurrection at Easter, we are reminded of the echoes of baptism ... the beginning of this season. In our own baptisms we are invited into that transformed life in which we see the world differently.

Throughout this season we have heard Jesus proclaim what a Kingdom of God might look like ... that the poor are blessed, the hungry are fed, the grieving are consoled and comforted. He told his listeners that they were the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They were, indeed, a transformed people. Today, as we end this season, we are reminded again in the Transfiguration that the transformed life is a life that we sometimes see in a mystical way ... and it can illumine even the ordinary.

"Epiphany" ... "a sudden realization ... a sudden intuitive leap of understanding, especially through an ordinary but striking occurrence."

Amen.