|  |
| --- |
| **The Sunday Missive -- February 19, 2023 The Last Sunday after Epiphany**  **Hymn 7 Christ whose glory fills the skies**  Christ, whose glory fills the skies, Christ, the true, the only Light, Sun of Righteousness, arise! Triumph over shades of night; Dayspring from on high, be near; Daystar, in my heart appear!  Dark and cheerless is the morn unaccompanied by thee; Joyless is the day’s return till thy mercy’s beams I see, As they inward light impart, glad my eyes, and warm my heart.  Visit then this soul of mine! Pierce the gloom of sin and grief! Fill me, radiancy divine; scatter all my unbelief; More and more thyself display, shining to the perfect day. |

**The Collect of the Day**

O God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Exodus 24:12-18**

The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. To the elders he had said, “Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.”

Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

**Psalm 2**

Why do the nations conspire\* ***And the peoples plot in vain?***

They rise up, the kings of the earth\* ***Princes plot against the Lord and his Anointed.***

Let us burst asunder their fetters\* ***Let us cast off from us their chains.***

He who sits in the heavens laughs\* ***The Lord derides and mocks them.***

Then he will speak in his anger\* ***His rage will strike them with terror.***

“It is I who have appointed my king on Sion, my holy mountain”\*  
***I will announce the decree of the Lord.***

The Lord said to me, “You are my child\* ***It is I who have begotten you this day.***

Ask and I will give you the nations as your inheritance\* ***And the ends of the earth as your possession.***

With a rod of iron you will rule them\* ***Like a potterʼs jar you will shatter the evil ones.***

So now, O kings, understand\* ***Take warning, rulers of the earth.***

Serve the LORD with fear; exult with trembling, pay him your homage\* ***Lest he be angry and you perish for suddenly God’s anger will blaze.***

**2 Peter 1:16-21**

We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, “This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

**Lift Every Voice and Sing Hymn 64 I love to tell the story**

I love to tell the story of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.  
I love to tell the story, because I know it’s true;  
It satisfies my longings as nothing else would do.

I love to tell the story; ‘twill be my theme in glory.  
To tell the old, old story of Jesus and His love.

I love to tell the story, for those who know it best  
Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it, like the rest.  
And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song,  
’Twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long.

**Matthew 17:1-9**

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is 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.” While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

**Hear Ye Him Last Epiphany A – Transfiguration**

As Thomas Aquinas, the monumental thirteenth-century philosopher declared “God is intelligible light.” Today we heard Matthew’s version of the story of what is known as “The Transfiguration of Jesus,” wherein extraordinary light reveals divine power – divine intelligence, if you will. In the third chapter of Matthew, when Jesus is baptized by John, Jesus’ nature as the divine child is revealed, both to John and to Jesus himself as the Spirit and voice of God demand their attention. Here in Chapter 17, the glorious revelation is to three of Jesus’ disciples. It is important to note that Jesus is not changed by what happens, it is disciples who are enlightened by the experience.

One of the main themes of history during the Renaissance was the development of vernacular-based language as the means of scholarship and literature. Beginning with Dante’s Italian in the late 13th century and continuing through the early 17th century achievements of Shakespeare and the King James Bible, classical Latin was no longer the only way learned people could express themselves, and that made all the difference. Here is how the King James Bible tells Matthew’s story of what those disciples experienced.

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.” And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead."

As we approach the holy season of Lent, which begins on Wednesday, when we here at St. Peter’s by the Sea will symbolize our mortality by putting a little bit of ash on our foreheads, this Sunday has been designated to celebrate the day Jesus and a handful of his closest followers took an invigorating and most enlightening hike on some hill nobody has been able to identify since.

One of the most wonderful aspects of life -- especially here -- is the appetite for walking amongst hills that we humans develop and exercise. Always physically rejuvenating, mentally and spiritually therapeutic, hillwalking is where we can figure stuff out. Sometimes we even get it right. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.” Help is on the way! Hill-walking is one of the main ways God has of getting our attention and communicating her purposes.

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the law.’ Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and they went up the mountain of God.” So, Moses goes up the mountain, (Joshua stays back at Advance Base Camp) and a big storm covers the mountain. “The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day God called to Moses out of the cloud.”

Well if you go hiking alone in the hills, and a big storm comes up that lasts for six days and you are still alive on the seventh, I guarantee you will have heard and seen God. That’s part of why we take a Sabbath after every six days running around the world bumping into each other in the dark: So we can touch base, erase the blackboard and reboot our tender self-involved souls.

“Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord looked like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain to the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud, and he was up there for forty days and forty nights.” Ok we know numbers like 7 and 40 are symbolic, so maybe he wasn’t in there a whole 40 days and 40 nights. So, maybe he’s only up there for six days and finally on number 7, the storm breaks and we’re like: “He’s never coming back.” But of course Moses does appear, with the tablets -- the laws we need to behave as God would have us behave -- and Joshua comes tumbling after.

## Consider Peter’s letter, wherein he tries to one-up Moses’ story, as if such a thing were possible saying, “We didn’t follow cleverly devised myths about our Lord Jesus Christ, we had eyewitnesses! Jesus’ honor and glory were revealed when the Voice of the Majestic Glory spoke saying, ‘This is my Beloved Child, with whom I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.”

## Now Peter’s story is not inherently more gripping than Moses’ story. It’s just newer. And the message has a different stress: “First of all you must understand this:” writes Peter “No prophecy is a matter of one’s solitary interpretation, because no prophecy ever originated in human will alone, but rather men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” Once upon a time, only the rarest few got personal spiritual intercourse with God, but now everyone has a shot at it. Just stick with Jesus like you would to the only guy in the outfit who still has a flashlight “until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” Then God will speak and work through each of us if we cooperate.

To continue with Matthew’s transfiguration story: Six days after they had acknowledged him as the Christ” (Six days again, somethin’s got to be cookin for number 7...), Jesus took Peter and the Zebedee Brothers on a hike in the hills. Just the four of them. Maybe the three followers went up there regularly to walk and think and try to comprehend their love for Jesus. But this time he was with them. The walk was invigorating: high mountain, heady company, they do some falling down at one point… And it was literally very physically enlightening because of Jesus’ face shining like the sun, and his clothes becoming dazzling white and all. They received physical and verbal signs that God was with them in the person of Jesus, to validate the spiritual knowledge they had begun to possess just six days before.

Now either the air was thin up there, or they started chewing on some sketchy berries but they began to hallucinate: There’s Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus, but just out of earshot. And Peter immediately wants to institutionalize the whole deal with new construction – tabernacles; one each -- but God snaps him out of it: This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased, listen to him! He has all the information you need.

The voice – the brilliant light -- is pointing out that we tend to do the same thing over and over, expecting to change and not changing. But the world does change -- all the time -- because every one of us interprets prophecy at will, which is to say that we are all to some extent at least a teensy bit emotionally ill, frequently wrong, and suffering the pains of growing up, no matter how old and wise we think we are. And we will keep missing our lives without even knowing it unless we learn to do things truly differently, like the Child of all Humankind, Jesus.

Thomas Aquinas’ ideals regarding social justice, ethical behaviour and the accountability of power are still our unreached goals. He argued that God is the source of both the light of natural reason and the light of faith. That is the light in which the disciples began to see Jesus six days earlier, and in which they saw Jesus so powerfully on that day on that mountain. That is the light we are invited and exhorted to witness ourselves.

In this brilliant light, we are able to see truth: in Moses’ hands, about the Law; in the company of Elijah, about the power of the one God; and in Jesus, the presence of God’s very self in our very midst. By extension, in this brilliant light, you and I are also able to see more quotidian truths we need to see in order to fulfill whatever purposes we may have in this life: truths about ourselves, and about how we treat other people and the whole rest of God’s Creation. As Johnny Nash suggested, in this light we can see clearly now; we can see all obstacles in our way. Gone are the dark clouds that had us blind and it can be a bright, bright sunshiny day.

But still more is necessary for that light of reason to become Thomas’ light of faith. When the disciples heard The Voice, they fell to the ground, overcome. When they looked up, they saw no one but Jesus; himself; alone. “Where’d those other two fellers go? You boys saw them too, right?” And when they all headed back down the hill, they were invigorated, enlightened, and very talkative: “That was awesome; let’s go tell everybody!” “But Jesus says not to talk about it just yet. Well, when, then? And why not?”

“Tell no one, my Beloved, until you have experienced the end of death for yourself, first-hand. “Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.” That will be something worth your witness.” Because God knows that, however powerful our stories may be, there is one thing more powerful than any story; that is lived experience. Yes, we love to tell the stories – of Moses, of Elijah, of Jesus too – they move us in the most wonderful ways. Perhaps they even transfigure us and make us shine brightly to each other. But our transformation only occurs when we have an experience that defies explanation and transcends story; when we are ourselves changed and we don’t just “believe in” Jesus, but come to know that the power of love can never be defeated by fears or powers or principalities; not even by death itself. Then we’ll have something to talk about.

**Hymn 460 Alleluia Sing to Jesus**

Alleluia! sing to Jesus! his the scepter, his the throne;   
Alleluia! His the triumph, his the victory alone;   
Hark! the songs of peaceful Zion thunder like a mighty flood;  
Jesus out of every nation hath redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia! not as orphans are we left in sorrow now;   
Alleluia! he is near us, faith believes, nor questions how:   
Though the cloud from sight received him, When the forty days were o'er,   
Shall our hearts forget his promise, "I am with you evermore"?

Alleluia! Bread of Heaven, thou on earth our food, our stay!  
Alleluia! here the sinful flee to thee from day to day:  
Intercessor, friend of sinners, earth's Redeemer, plead for me,  
Where the songs of all the sinless sweep across the crystal sea.

**Moonrise**

I awoke in the Midsummer not to call night, in the white and the walk of the morning:

The moon, dwindled and thinned to the fringe of a finger-nail held to the candle,  
 Or paring of paradisaïcal fruit, lovely in waning but lustreless,  
 Stepped from the stool, drew back from the barrow, of dark Maenefa the mountain;  
 A cusp still clasped him, a fluke yet fanged him, entangled him, not quit utterly.  
 This was the prized, the desirable sight, unsought, presented so easily,  
 Parted me leaf and leaf, divided me, eyelid and eyelid of slumber.

Gerard Manley Hopkins