

The Sunday Missive – February 11, 2024 The Last Sunday after the Epiphany

Hymn 779 The church of Christ in every age

The church of Christ in every age, beset by change but spirit led,
Must claim and test its heritage and keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street, the victims of injustice cry
For shelter and for bread to eat and never live until they die.

Then let the servant church arise. A caring church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice, and clothed in Christ's humanity.

For Christ alone, whose blood was shed, can cure the fever in our blood.
And teach us how to share our bread and feed the starving multitude.

We have no mission but to serve in full obedience to our Lord:
To care for all without reserve, and spread Christ's liberating word.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SIBu6bNSKYY>

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.*

2 Kings 2:1-12

When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha,

“Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?” And he said, “Yes, I know; keep silent.”

Elijah said to him, “Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, “Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?” And he answered, “Yes, I know; be silent.”

Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So, the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.” Elisha said, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” He responded, “You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.” As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, “Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!” But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

Psalm 50

The Lord, the God of gods, has spoken* ***Has called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.***

Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty* ***God is revealed forever in glory.***

Our God will come and will not keep silence* ***Before God there is a consuming flame, and round about the Lord a raging storm.***

Who calls the heavens and the earth from above* ***To witness the judgment of all people.***

Gather before me the righteous ones* ***Those who have made a covenant with me and sealed it with the sacrifice of justice.***

Let the heavens declare the rightness of this cause* ***For it is God alone who will judge.***

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Wonder, Love & Praise 773 Heal me, hands of Jesus

Heal me, hands of Jesus, and search out all my pain:
Restore my hope, remove my fear and bring me peace again.

Cleanse me, blood of Jesus, take bitterness away;
Let me forgive as one forgiven and bring me peace today.

Know me, mind of Jesus, and show me all my sin;
Dispel the memories of guilt, and bring me peace within.

Fill me, joy of Jesus: anxiety shall cease
And heaven's serenity be mine, for Jesus brings me peace!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgYxF_Rs9yQ

Mark 9:2-9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Into the High Places – Transfiguration B

The purpose of our reading and preaching about holy scripture is, in the elegant phrasing of Cranmer's Advent collect, "...to hear them, to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life..." We recall that part of what makes the Anglican Church the *via media* (middle way) is the conviction that our beliefs and practices must derive from a thorough and unbiased integration of scripture, tradition and reason. Affectionately referred to as a three-legged stool – there's that rule of three again – this context is what makes life in the Episcopal tradition particularly interesting.

But that can mean interesting in the sense that my beloved Mom used to say my early attempts at cookery were interesting. She was being diplomatic about things that she thought were at times difficult to digest, or even swallow. In such an atmosphere, it is impossible to achieve perfect equilibrium amongst the three, yet we are teaching and living heresy if we stress one of them such that it obscures the others. But our way of doing things is meant to engender exposure to and tolerance of a wide spectrum of theological belief and traditional

opinion, as well as bold and searching talk about how the stories of faith history enable us to think about, understand and formulate the stories of our own experience.

With Paul, we are attempting to unveil what it is the Gospel is trying to tell us; to bathe in its light and be changed by Jesus; to avail ourselves of the transformative power of faith without taking credit for its inception or control of its authority. “It is God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ and who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ: Jesus.”

Today’s readings are a perfect example of the process of marking and digesting the old as a way of incorporating the new. If we would comprehend Jesus as the totality of the law and the prophets, we would do well to show how he embodies the greatest attributes of traditional heroes of the faith. Moses represents the law, so Jesus on the mountaintop shines just like Moses. Elijah was the quintessential prophet; thus Jesus will be whooshed up into heaven just like him.

When we picture this great scene on the mountaintop, with the small group of apostles witnessing the encounter among Jesus, Moses and Elijah, we infer that Jesus has all the attributes of the other two combined. He represents the culmination of the stories of the law and the prophets, and now he is taking over from them for the next era of humanity’s relationship with God Almighty.

Today we acknowledge that we too are summoned to go to that elevated place of seclusion, suitable for divine self-disclosure, to follow Jesus and Peter, James and John and to experience again – as if for the first time – this most mysterious and dazzling of revelations. The only thing we are asked to bring with us up the mountain is our imagination and a childlike openness to wonder.

St. Augustine once asked himself what God was doing before creating heaven and earth. He decided that God was making hell for minds that pry. To climb the mountain, therefore, with prying minds hell-bent on debunking the mystical or disproving the miraculous is akin to killing something to see how it’s made. Sadly, it’s the only thing that works for rabies and certain other afflictions like CTE -- which one

hates to mention on Super Bowl Sunday -- but it sure doesn't work for faith. What occurred on the mountain surpasses institutional practices and intellectual categories. And it was only when Jesus was inexplicably raised alive that we realized who he was. In the season of Epiphany, as H. K. Oehmig has so gracefully put it, "...this season of the showing forth of God in Christ, the begetting of the story has developed into the beholding of it." The beholding of it by the apostles on Mount Tabor is the result, and by any of us with hearts to hear and souls to see.

Just as Joseph was revealed to his brothers in his miraculous rebirth of forgiveness and plenty, Jesus is "shown forth" for what God really is, the One who comes into our world that we might enter the sacred and eternal habitat ourselves. This inbreaking of the holy, wherein the invisible becomes visible, is what led Thomas Aquinas to remark, "I have seen things that make all my writing seem like straw." Here is the mysterious alchemy of scripture, tradition and reason employed and surpassed.

In the Transfiguration, Jesus in his altered form represents what Joseph Campbell called the paradox of two worlds in one. Revelation in the economy of God is always purposeful. Just as the awesome voice had spoken to Jesus at his baptism, affirming for him the arduous ministry that lay ahead, so now the voice addresses these three Apostles, who will become the leadership of the Jerusalem church.

The manner in which these events take place is, perhaps difficult to fathom or believe, but it doesn't matter so much. The meaning of the story: the resulting metamorphosis that takes place in Peter, James and John when Christ's glory is revealed is what is important here. Their new condition is an awakened state, marked by an awareness of God's presence here and now. This thrusts them into a new life, where everything that is, every being they encounter is an extension and revelation of that holy truth.

In Mary Zimmerman's play *Metamorphoses*, the Woman speaks of the consciousness she longs for: "Bodies, I have in mind, and how they can change to assume new shapes – I ask the help of the gods, who know the trick: change me, and let me glimpse the secret and speak,

better than I know how, of the world's birthing, and the creation of all things, from the very first to the very latest."

She prays to be thrust into a new life. Again paradoxically, it is a life at once more disciplined and more free. One becomes conscious of the vastness of creation and our relative insignificance on the one hand, and the complete and individualized freedom to love we have been given in our humanity on the other.

We have heard – perhaps we have said – the prayer: "Please answer me, God; why are you so silent." Yet whenever we have seen love and humility in action and have given ourselves up to its power, we know our prayers are heard and thereby answered. Unlike in this evening's activities, here, 'surrender to prevail' is the whole game, or, as Gandhi was known to say, "God speaks to us every day, but we rarely listen."

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.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xr7IYNgy0mE>

Eschatology

i'm confident that the absolute dregs of possibility for this society,
the sugary coffee mound at the bottom of this cup,
our last best hope that when our little bit of assigned plasma implodes
it won't go down as a green mark in the cosmic ledger,
lies in the moment when you say hello to a bus driver
and they say it back—

when someone holds the door open for you
and you do a little jog to meet them where they are—

walking my dog, i used to see this older man
and whenever I said good morning,
he replied 'GREAT morning'—

in fact, all the creative ways our people greet each other
may be the icing on this flaming trash cake hurtling through the ether.

when the clerk says *how are you*
and i say 'i'm blessed and highly favored'

i mean my toes have met sand, and wiggled in it, a lot.
i mean i have laughed until i choked and a friend slapped my back.
i mean my niece wrote me a note: 'you are so smart + intellajet'

i mean when we do go careening into the sun,

i'll miss crossing guards ushering the grown folks too, like ducklings
and the lifeguards at the community pool and
men who yelled out the window that they'd fix the dent in my car,
right now! it'd just take a second—

and actually everyone who tried to keep me alive, keep me afloat,
and if not unblemished, suitably repaired.

but I won't feel too sad about it,
becoming a star

Eve. L. Ewing