

Last Epiphany – Year C – February 14, 2010
Exodus 34:29-35; Psalm 99; 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2; Luke 9:28-43a
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Faithfulness. According to Thomas Groome, there are three major dimensions of the Christian faith: believing, trusting, and doing God's will. Over two hundred and twenty years ago, as the story goes, the Connecticut House of Representatives was in session. It was a sunny day in May and the delegates were working with the benefit of natural sunlight. What happened next was a complete surprise. Quite unexpectedly, but no doubt right on schedule, there was an eclipse of the sun. The House was plunged into darkness.

It is hard to imagine the impact of Jesus' transfiguration on Peter, James and John. But it is entirely fitting that this story is the one we hear at the culmination of the season of Epiphany, for this is truly an epiphany moment. It is also the confirmation of Jesus' full divinity as well as His humanity: God made man, manifest in the person of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world. For the disciples, first there is the blinding light, and then the blinding darkness, as the cloud overshadows them. This small band of chosen disciples are meant to see, and they are also meant to hear. However, as *we* will see and hear, that is just the beginning of the more pressing meaning and intent here.

First let's put this in context with God's sending of the prophet Isaiah from last Sunday's Old Testament reading: and God said to Isaiah, "Go and say to this people: 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.' Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed" (Isaiah 6:9-10). As Jesus the Messiah goes about his ministry, the same themes apply to many of the Judean leaders. They oppose Jesus, because their minds are still dull, their ears stopped, and their eyes closed. They do not comprehend the evidence before them. They do not heed the call to repent; and so they are not able to accept the gift of healing, which in Christ is the gift of salvation.

Luke's choice of words amplifies the importance of seeing. While Jesus is praying on the mountain the **appearance** of His faces changes. The disciples suddenly **see** two men with Jesus. Moses and Elijah also **appear** in glory. The disciples **see** the glory of Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Then, as if to deliberately shift the focus, all sight is removed, in effect replaced with fear, as they enter the cloud. God's voice speaks with two affirmations of Jesus' divinity, and a command to the disciples, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" The disciples are described as sleepy, which is just another way of saying that they are dull in their faith. They hear God through a cloud of fear, and despite being companions of Jesus; their understanding remains foggy and dense. They see, but don't quite get it. Peter wants to build booths, as if it is possible to capture and memorialize God's glory in a fixed and limited place. His ignorance is dismissed by Luke as **not knowing** what he is saying.

Faithfulness. The intellectual dimension of a faithful Christian life supports our belief. We don't want to lose sight of the deeper message today, yet we cannot ignore the significance of Luke's clues either. There are several pieces of a much larger puzzle that will make the picture clearer for us. The allusions and references to the exodus provide the corners of our puzzle. Moses is a key figure in the original exodus event. While he was called to Mt. Sinai to meet with God and bring the Law to the people, we are drawn beyond the boundaries of the Law, to see Moses as a great prophet. He tells us in Deuteronomy (18:15) that God will raise up another prophet like him to lead the people, one whom the people will heed. God's own words indicate that Jesus is the one to whom the people must listen, as they listened to Moses. The original exodus is also associated with a cloud that leads the people by day, and the cloud of God's glory that descends upon the tent of meeting whenever Moses enters into God's presence. The mountain setting, the companions – all evoke a recollection of the exodus and provoke us to consider the implications of Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus about *His* exodus, or departure, to be accomplished in Jerusalem. Elijah's presence tells the disciples that whoever people may think He is, Jesus is evidently not Elijah. Elijah is also the prophet of restoration, the one who is to appear prior to the coming of Messiah. The whole scene unfolds

as a gift of revelation. A revelation of the continuity of God's work of liberation and reconciliation linking Moses and Elijah with Jesus. A revelation of Jesus as Messiah, the one who is God's Son, the anointed one. A revelation of Jesus' true nature, for those who have eyes to see the divine Light of the world revealed in eternal glory. A revelation of glory, defined and fulfilled through a life of suffering, and death on a cross. A revelation of a new exodus, wherein Christ's sacrifice secures the liberation of the whole world, for those who accept God's gift of faith in Him. Now that we have seen and heard, how will you and I respond in our own unique ways, and as a community of faith? Now that we have experienced freedom in Christ, what happens when we come down off the mountain?

There are three aspects to the relational dimension of a faithful life in Christ. The first is the formation of our faith through a trusting relationship with our Lord Jesus. Then there is growth in loving relationships within a community of faith. And thirdly a relationship of kindness and justice extending to the whole human family. After God speaks, the three disciples are silenced, quite contrary to the proclamation of the crowd that witness Jesus' healing of the boy that the other disciples have been unable to heal. Jesus is exasperated. Despite being empowered to cast out all demons and heal the sick, the disciples have failed. Jesus quotes Moses' own lament over the perverse and crooked generation that does not embody God's faithfulness. The healing of the man's only son parallel's Jesus' transfiguration as faith in action, a practical application of the power inherent and available for all those who lead a faithful life. Jesus' charge against the disciples is faithlessness. It is apparent that the exercise of Christ-like power and authority goes beyond merely being empowered. As it has been said, the hardest part for the earliest disciples, as well as for you and me, is simple faithfulness in our work and in our attitudes. The kind of faithfulness that shows we are being drawn forward powerfully to enlarge God's kingdom on earth.

Faithfulness. The eclipse of the sun caused no small amount of general alarm and fear for the Connecticut House of Representatives. Some wanted to adjourn or pray in preparation for what they thought may be the second coming of the Lord. It turns out that the speaker of the House, being a Christian had something to say. With common sense amply informed by faith in Christ he observed that everyone was upset by the sudden darkness. Going on to say, "the Day of the Lord is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. And if the Lord is returning, I, for one, choose to be found [fulfilling my responsibilities]. I therefore ask that candles be brought." Needless to say, after a short delay, the debate resumed. The behavioral dimension of those committed to the Christian faith is praxis. Faith in action always entails a desire to follow Christ as a disciple, the discernment of God's will, and the surrender of self as we each respond to God's call. The light of Christ shines within the faithful, and bursts out revealing Christ to the world as we practice God's graciousness.

The light of Christ will continue to guide us as we move through our Lenten reflections, where you and I each have the opportunity to deepen our faith and trust in God, build even stronger bonds of love in relationship, and offer ourselves with renewed intentionality to God's service in ministry. Our final epiphany lesson is the gift of sight to see what is in need of change, and to envision an alternative reality. To hear God's voice as we discern what we must seek or relinquish to embrace the future. And to draw on the strength of God through our faith in Christ to take the steps we must take to embody the future in the present. As Jesus modeled for us, let each of us, as faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus, enact the new reality through our own faith in action. In trust and faith, we know that Christ's presence will draw us to become one with Him in our mission to the world.

Amen.