

**Last Epiphany – Year B – February 2, 2009**  
**2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9**  
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Have you noticed that reality ain't what it used to be? And if Yogi Berra never said that, I think we'll just go ahead and give him the credit anyway! What I'm talking about are the things we have traditionally taken for granted that are no longer reliable or stable elements of our lives. I bet that there are more than a couple of people here today who are anxious about whether they will still have a job three weeks or three months from now. I bet that there are also several folks here today who are worried about the future of the world we are shaping even now for our children and grandchildren. For example, are we stealing their future by failing to explore and expand alternative means of energy? There are still a handful of us, who have lived long enough to have experienced some of these losses and uncertainties before, yet I'll say it again, reality ain't what it used to be.

I will admit a comfortable life suits me just fine. Beyond the basics of food, clothes, and shelter, I expect to be able to get into my car and drive wherever I want to go, or to take a vacation. For the most part, wherever we live, our expectations and day-to-day realities are fashioned by the world around us. For those who have much, like me and you, we run the risk of being lulled into complacency, the kind of comfortable place that renders us mostly harmless to the status quo. Just forget for a moment why we might need to be flexible and willing to change, because there is a more pressing question. Why on earth would we want to change anything? Except perhaps to get more of what we already have. Of course, everything is relative, but somewhere just below the surface of our minds you and I have come to believe this very comfortable reality is nothing less than what we deserve. More than that, many of us probably feel that since we've worked hard all our lives we've earned the benefits we enjoy. Perhaps if pressed, we would even agree that we are entitled to them. The good news is that today's Gospel reading changes everything we think we know about reality, about relationships, and about being mostly harmless to the status quo.

The story of Jesus' glorious transfiguration is a fitting culmination to the season of Epiphany. It is the final story before we take our Lenten journey along with Jesus as He prepares to walk willingly to an ignominious death on a cross. We already know Jesus is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end in the sweeping history of salvation. From creation through to the victory and hope of the resurrection, even as we await His coming again in glory. That same glory is the reality shining through the Gospel story today. However, Jesus' disciples are still struggling. This is the second of Jesus' teachings about his death and resurrection in the Gospel of Mark, and the disciples have not come to terms with the prophetic truth that Jesus will die, and will rise again to new and unending life. The transfiguration of Jesus is a glimpse of the eternal reality that dwells like a shadow behind all that our five senses normally perceive as real. This reality was brought to birth in the incarnation so that we might see more clearly than ever before what is truly real, through Jesus the Word made flesh. The season of Epiphany celebrates the life and work of Jesus as the true Light of the world showing us all the veracity of God's love. Not just the fact that God *is* love. Not merely that God loves us all so much that He gave His only Son for the life of the world. But exactly what that love looks like in the life of a human being. How love works itself through our faith, transforming our lives and compelling us to respond. Faith in action is you and I as embodied agents of God's justice and compassion. Faith in action is you and I, as walking, talking advocates and ambassadors of God's mercy and providential care.

The sight of the transfigured Jesus talking with Elijah and Moses terrifies Peter, James and John. After this vision, and after hearing God speaking from the cloud, they look around and the Scripture says, "they saw no one with them any more, **but only Jesus.**" But. Only. Jesus. This is it. This is where reality becomes more than the disciples can handle. How many of us respond in much

the same way as the three disciples? Peter, James and John, can all handle “only Jesus”, but had a much harder time with the real Jesus, and more specifically the implications of His transfiguration. With our tendency to independence and our desire to be in control, do we too conflate Jesus into “just Jesus”? I think we all do that at least some of the time, and in so doing, we talk ourselves into loving a kind of harmless image of a man called Jesus. The reality of Jesus as God incarnate *is* hard. There is a strange comfort in hanging on to the image of Jesus as a good man who lives a simple life, preaching and teaching about a loving God, who has a gift for healing. There are a lot of men and women who could claim the same. When Jesus becomes more than “just Jesus” Peter, James and John are terrified. And I wonder if they are terrified because they realize in that moment that nothing can remain the same.

What Jesus showed us all, and what God told us on that mountain is the reality of Jesus. He is the One who has come to change the world, not just by the example of his life and ministry, but because of what He did as our Lord and Savior, and the way in which this was accomplished. This is Jesus, God incarnate, a living witness to God’s power over sin and death, the One who gives and sustains all life. This is Jesus who did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill both the Law and all that was spoken by the prophets about the Messiah. This is Jesus, who sets aside His majesty, who humbles Himself to take on human form, to show us how to love God and serve our neighbors. Most importantly, the real Jesus challenged the complacency of the Judean leaders and proved that there is a kingdom more real and lasting than any human-made empire. Jesus the humble servant has more power than we can possibly imagine. He does not come with force, yet has changed more lives than any other person has or ever will. He dies in weakness, but is Life everlasting. And if you and I really believe the reality of Jesus and the Gospel, the only way we render God’s Word harmless to the world is by choosing fear over love and truth, and binding anxiety instead of freedom in Christ. Life as a disciple of Jesus Christ is not safe or risk-free. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is Good News and it is as much a threat to comfort and complacency now as it was to those who wielded power in first century Palestine. The last thing the Roman Empire or the Judean leaders wanted was the kind of change that enlightened people about God’s kingdom of equality and justice, love and mercy. Power is very seductive. When maintaining the status quo benefits us so richly, how do we follow Jesus’ example, where God’s power is made perfect in weakness?

We have a huge advantage over Peter, James and John. According to Revelation, you and I are made “a kingdom of priests, serving God”. We are God’s empowered and blessed children, clothed in righteousness, freed from the bondage of sin and death, filled with God’s love, and most important of all bearers of the Gospel of hope. There is nowhere we can go that is outside of God’s perfect love and grace. The reality is that you and I have nothing to be afraid of. What we see and hear on the mountain today with Peter, James and John tells us that the status quo is a false reality. The stock in trade of worldly powers is to raise the fear factor, to render us mostly harmless, so that we pose no threat of change to inequitable systems. Yet as the Body of Christ, you and I are set apart from this world to listen to God’s beloved Son, and continue to build His kingdom of justice and peace. Let’s remember as we enter the season of Lent this week that it is a time of listening, and a time of transformation. The good news is, in Jesus Christ our Lord, reality really isn’t what it used to be. Praise God!

Amen.