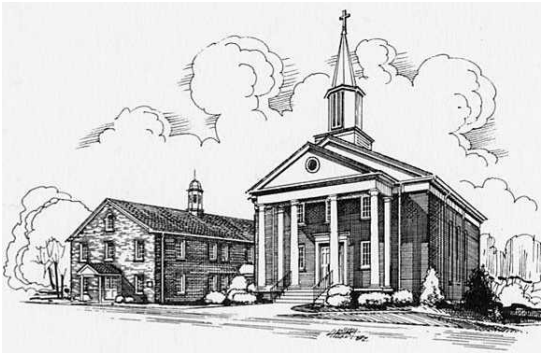
The Lessons Appointed

for Use on the

Last Sunday after the Epiphany



Year A

RCL

Psalm 99
2 Peter 1:16-21
Matthew 17:1-9

The Collect

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*.

Psalm 99

1 The LORD is King; let the people tremble; * he is enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth shake.

2 The LORD is great in Zion; * he is high above all peoples.

3 Let them confess his Name, which is great and awesome; * he is the Holy One.

4 “O mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity; * you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.”

5 Proclaim the greatness of the LORD our God and fall down before his footstool; * he is the Holy One.

6 Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among those who call upon his Name, * they called upon the LORD, and he answered them.

7 He spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud; * they kept his testimonies and the decree that

he gave them.

8 O LORD our God, you answered them indeed; * you were a God who forgave them, yet punished them for their evil deeds.

9 Proclaim the greatness of the LORD our God and worship him upon his holy hill; * for the LORD our God is the Holy One.

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.

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.”

SERMON

This is the last Sunday in the season of Epiphany. It began with the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child (and thus Jesus' physical manifestation to the Gentiles). It ends, this Sunday, with the Transfiguration. Epiphany is followed by Lent, a season of quiet in which we can try to come to terms, internally, with what we have witnessed. That’s our responsibility as mature Christians. We have heard the stories so often, they are in danger of becoming mere bits of tradition to us. We can’t allow that to happen. Let’s see if we can restore the majesty of Epiphany.

An epiphany is a sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of

something, usually initiated by some simple, homely, or commonplace occurrence or experience. In eighth grade, Ms. Schrivner, one of the most unpleasant women I have ever met, was trying to teach me how to do arithmetic with signed numbers. I just couldn't get it until one day, I had a sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of signed arithmetic. I had an epiphany! Without considering the consequences, I blurted out, "Adding a negative number is the same as subtracting a positive number!"

That did not end well for me, but I came away from the experience with a better grasp of the subject. That's what SHOULD happen to us during the season of Epiphany. What SHOULD happen as we

consider the magnitude of these events is that we should be left so breathless that we need the season of Lent to recover. We don't always do that. As I said, we have heard the story so often, and we have so many other concerns pressing upon us, that it becomes almost impossible to truly hear the story. Nevertheless, the Transfiguration is a pivotal moment where human nature meets God: the meeting place of the temporal and the eternal, with Jesus himself as the connecting point, acting as the bridge between heaven and earth. It is a key episode and almost immediately follows the Confession of Peter: "You are the Christ".

For the past six Sundays, I've been trying to help you recover the gut punch experience of Peter,

James, and John which dropped them to the ground. God, the incomparable, God the undefinable, has become like us to present us a choice: Will we engage this miracle and lift it from a grave of tradition to which we have consigned it to become the life-changing expression of the presence of the divine experienced by Peter, James and John or will we roll it into a part of our Christmas celebration and leave it as we found it?

I really want you to walk with Peter, James and John up the mountain. It's steep! There are loose stones. It's easy to lose your footing, but you, Peter, James, and John keep your eyes on the teacher and follow His lead, arriving safely at the top. They trust and love their teacher, but something is

about to happen which will shake them to their core, and forever change the way they can live their lives. You are witness! Watch closely!

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.

Moses and Elijah, the great prophets of Israel! And Jesus is with them. Their presence establishes the fields from which the new message will flower, but this is not to be a simple teaching. This is to be something else, entirely.

Impulsive Peter begins jabbering about what he might do to make this experience more memorable as Peter is wont to do, but...

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.

The veil between the profane and the divine has been opened. Soon enough, it will be torn, but that is yet to come. Peter, James, and John are shown their beloved teacher for what he really is — the Son, the Beloved.

We have heard this story so often that its cutting edge has been dulled and its power to cleave us from our accustomed paths has been lost, I fear. I also fear that without giving the matter proper concern, we have allowed ourselves to be OK with this minimized Epiphany. Peter, James, and John, though, received the full brunt of it, falling to the

ground. The cleaver of God's word falls upon them:

> "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

"Listen to Him!" the voice demands. All ye who seek a comfortable faith, an undemanding couch upon which to recline, being careful never to discuss politics or religion for fear of upsetting your comfort, Listen to Him! All ye who seek only heaven when you die and feel no responsibility toward God's children here and now, Listen to Him. Listen with Dietrich Bonhoeffer who speaks to us from a cruel grave.

> **"You have only one master now...But with this 'yes' to God belongs just as clear a 'no.' Your 'yes' to God requires your 'no' to all injustice, to all evil, to all**

lies, to all oppression and violation of the weak and poor, to all ungodliness, and to all mockery of what is holy. Your 'yes' to God requires a 'no' to everything that tries to interfere with your serving God alone, even if that is your job, your possessions, your home, or your honour in the world. Belief means decision."

Your 'yes' to God requires your 'no' to all injustice, to all evil, to all lies, to all oppression and violation of the weak and poor, to all ungodliness, and to all mockery of what is holy. How could Peter, James, and John go back to business as usual after this experience? How could any of us, once we truly experience it? But the voice of Jesus is not the only one we hear. Another voice teaches that you don't discuss politics or religion. It's not polite. It makes people uncomfortable, so we lock the

accounts of the Transfiguration up in holy frames for display on the walls of our lives, rather than consuming them and allowing them to nourish us. Better we pretend that the evil does not stalk among us, we think, than that we should open an uncomfortable discussion. But Jesus, who heeded no such voices, carried on His uncomfortable discussion all the way to the hill of Calvary.

What sorts of uncomfortable discussions am I speaking of? January 27 marked the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In a recent poll, two-thirds of American millennials could not identify what Auschwitz is, nor identify the genocide that killed 6 million Jews during World War II. Two thirds! What does your 'yes' to Jesus say of

your obligation to bring your knowledge to the young of our time, that they might not be tempted to repeat this horror?

A little less than 80 years ago, President Roosevelt signed a document which resulted in the forced incarceration of 120,000 people in concentration camps. Nearly two thirds of them were American citizens. Their crime? Being Japanese. What does your ‘yes’ to Jesus demand of you should you see similar circumstances in our time?

This week, Federal Judge David Bury ruled that the conditions migrants and asylum seekers have had to face under Customs and Border Protection custody are so inhumane as to be unconstitutional. What does your ‘yes’ to Jesus’ teaching tell you of

that? Can you remain silent?

Our ‘no’ to all mockery of what is holy has to be heard throughout the world. Our ‘no’ to the violation of the weak and poor must ring through all creation. We must be nourished by the Gospel, that we might go into the world as carriers of the Gospel message and teach our young people.

Eat, church, and be filled.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Morning is God's way of saying one more time, go make a difference, touch a heart, encourage a mind, inspire a soul and enjoy the day. You have much responsibility to God's children, all of them, if you would carry the name 'Christian'. What say you?

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.
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