

February 14, 2021
The Last Sunday of Epiphany

2 Kings 2:1-12
Psalm 50:1-6
2 Corinthians 4:3-6
Mark 9:2-9

The snow is beautiful...when it first falls. The world grows quiet for a time. We slow down and breathe. We listen to the simplicity around us. No cars on the road, no planes overhead, no construction noises across the street. Even the animals are silent except for the few birds that linger around the bird feeder.

It's these kinds of moments that allow us to just be. Quiet, still, calm. The air is crisp and you feel alive walking through inches of snow that have been untouched by anyone else on earth. Everything is new and clean and hopeful.

But, the sad truth is that the snow doesn't stay white for long. The glory of the sun shimmering off of new fallen snow only lasts a day or so. All too soon, the snow turns dirty shades of brown. It starts to melt into an ugly sloshy mess. It splatters on cars and makes getting to the grocery store an absolute nightmare. Before long, we find ourselves in absolute disgust at the inconvenience of it all and begin to moan about how much longer it will be until spring rolls around and flowers start to bloom.

Funny how the quick we are to find the worst in our situation. How soon the joy fades. We all know the feeling. What is it about our disdain of dirty snow? Is it that we simply miss the purity of a new snow fall? Maybe we miss the peace and quiet that initially came with the storm. Or, maybe we get so focused on the ideal of the snow that we are caught off guard when things get messy.

I can pretty much tell you that I can calculate when that is going to happen for me. It takes about 6-8 hours and I begin to dread the iced over slippery disaster of the morning after the storm. The slushy melt that follows and the filthy cars that will need to be washed. 6-8 hours is about all of the joy I can count on.

I kind of wonder if that is how the Transfiguration felt for Peter, James, and John. A moment of pure wonder and awe. And, then it faded and reality came back into focus as they headed back down the mountain. The tough stuff was still ahead.

Yet, I can't help but think that these kinds of "wonder" moments are critical for us...even if they don't last forever. They are important because we need to be reminded that when life gets difficult, when we face adversity, when challenges seem insurmountable, that we know in our hearts that goodness and grace are possible. We have seen it and felt it.

When Jesus is transfigured, he doesn't change inwardly. He changes in visible ways that the disciples can see and can believe. Jesus' outward transfiguration provides for them that moment of wonder that draws them closer to who Jesus wants them to be. Jesus is transfigured

so that the disciples may be transformed. In other words, Jesus shows them outwardly who he wants them to be inwardly. Jesus knows that the journey ahead will not be like this moment. It will be incredibly difficult. They will face persecution. They will struggle with doubt and denial. They will be tested and persecuted. Their inner strength and conviction and faith will be essential for the work ahead.

Theologian Melinda Quivik states that what we learn from this story highlights the crucial work of each of us in the world – who we are called to be as Christians when we come down from the mountain. She says that we are, “...to accompany Jesus to the cross, to take up our crosses, to die in order to live, to be last in order to be first....The church (meaning each of us) has a responsibility: to listen to God’s son. That listening does not result in staying aloof where the air is pure and the view is stunning. The church must listen to the voice of God’s Word in our midst so that we follow in a way that leads to the cross.”

That’s our inner transformation that comes from the moment of Jesus’ outer transfiguration.

This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!

Listen to him when things get hard. Listen to him when you don’t know how you are going to move forward. Listen to him when you don’t know if you have the strength to carry your own cross.

Listen to him, because we aren’t promised that the perfect snow fall will stay beautiful forever. We know the beauty will fade. We know the silence will retreat. We know the world will get busy and complicated once again. And, so, we are called to listen and then we are called to follow down the mountain and to the cross.

On Wednesday, we begin our Lenten season. The first thing we will be reminded of after the brilliance of today is the messiness ahead. We take ashes, spread them on our foreheads and remember that life is both grace and grit, splendor and spectacle. And, like the disciples we aren’t called to stay on the mountain. We are called into the world. That’s where God needs us to be.

But, for today, we linger in the beauty. And, we begin to prepare for the journey ahead.

I want to end my reflection with a prayer that I hope may provide words of hope as you travel down your own mountain, listening to God leading you on...

A Prayer for the Overwhelmed

*O God who holds all things and makes all things new,
We come to you tired – bodies weary, minds flooded, hearts overwhelmed.
We wonder where you are in these turbulent times that overload
Our bodies, minds, and souls.*

*O God who illuminates the darkness, help us smash the heavy idols we hold,
So that we may live freely and lightly in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Help us be gentle with ourselves and with others as we walk through this day,
And as we go, help us discern what to enter into
And what we need to step away from.*

*O God, whose largeness cares for every sparrow and
Every single hair on our heads,
Help us cling to You in the unknowing and lead us to rest in You
When our inner and outer lives are overwhelmed.
And when we have rested, may we enter into the work
Of creating a more just, more peaceful, more equitable world.
Amen.*