

Grace Episcopal Church
Last Sunday after the Epiphany
Rev Brian C Justice

Exodus 24.12-18
2 Peter 1.16-21
Psalm 2
Matthew 17.1-19

The Signs

+

O God of Holy Light,
Help us to remember the signs.
Amen.

In *The Silver Chair*, which is Book 6 of *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, the divine lion Aslan says this to the young girl Jill:

But ... remember, remember, remember the signs.

Say them to yourself when you wake in the morning and when you lie down at night, and when you wake in the middle of the night.

And whatever strange things may happen to you, let nothing turn your mind from following the signs.

And secondly, I give you a warning.

Here on the mountain I have spoken to you clearly: I will not often do so down in Narnia. Here on the mountain, the air is clear and your mind is clear; as you drop down into Narnia, the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not confuse your mind. And the signs which you have learned here will not look at all as you expect them to look, when you meet them there. That is why it is so important to know them by heart and pay no attention to appearances.

Remember the signs and believe the signs.

Nothing else matters.

Aslan to Jill on the mountain. Ah ... the mountain.

+

In the sacred stories of the world and in our own lives, the “mountain” is that archetypal place where we have *those* experiences ... those moments of immense blessing and belonging, of inspiration and clarity, of presence and love.

On the mountain, we are in that thin place, that liminal place ... where we are at – or on both sides of – a boundary, a threshold ... and we are granted a vision of the glory of everything ... and ... everything is lit up in that rare and different light.

Moses encountered the Burning Bush and received the Torah on the mountain ...
Mt Sinai.

Elijah experienced the divine fire of God on the mountain ...
Mt Carmel.

Muhammad received the Quran on the mountain ...
Mt Noor.

Jesus was transfigured on the mountain ...
Mt Tabor.

We hear Matthew’s account of this experience in today’s Gospel text. It is an epiphany that reveals the meaning of what Aslan calls “the signs”: because of the Incarnation, “the light of Mt Tabor” is everywhere. The incarnate light of God touches and transfigures everyone and everything.

+

Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up to a “high mountain” and as Jesus prays, his face and his body are set ablaze in dazzling light. Suddenly, appearing with Jesus are Moses and Elijah, who are the symbols of the Torah and the Prophets, respectively.

There, upon Mt Tabor, the divine light lights up everything.
Everything is changed.
Everything is transfigured.

Everything shines in the glory of the incarnate presence of God.

During this mystical vision, this epiphany upon the mountain, Peter says, “Master, it is good for us to be here. Let’s make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

What Peter means is that he wants to stay with his friends on the mountaintop with Jesus and Moses and Elijah forever.

Of course he does! We all do! In those moments, high on the mountain, we want to stay in it forever.

Right?

But part of the mystery is that it doesn’t work that way. We don’t live and work on mountaintops. We live and work in the fields and in the valleys below.

But while we are on the mountain, we are (as Aslan tells Jill) shown the signs ... and ... we are given a spark of divine fire to take with us.

And that spark of divine fire – that holy flame – gives us something. It gives us the inspiration, the power, the courage to do the servant’s work of love that is ours to do in the fields and in the valleys.

God does not call us to a task without empowering us to do the task. We all have it in us. We all have the spark. We all shine in the light. We forget sometimes, or maybe we don’t know, or we can’t feel it, or we can’t believe it at a particular moment ... but we do have it. We do. We all do. It’s right here: in our hands, in our heart, in our head.

And I think something else happens when we trust that divine spark – no matter our thoughts or feelings or circumstances in a given moment – when we trust that divine spark and we do the servant’s work of love, like Jesus did ...

I think that’s when we remember the signs.

And what are the signs? ... The signs are the ordinary things of everyday life. The signs are the places we go and the people we know. And the things we do. And the time we have.

Those are the signs. Those are the signs because they are touched by the light of God: they have the sacred, the holy within them. Everything is transfigured. Everything has the sacred in it. Everything is “a sign” of immediate, incarnate divine presence. That God is right here.

This is the deep meaning of the Incarnational, Sacramental theology of the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican / Episcopalian traditions.

Peter, James, and John found out the light of Mt Tabor shines not only high on the mountain but also in the fields and in the valleys below where they labor and live. They had to go to the mountain to see the light. But once they saw it there, they could never *un* - see it anywhere. They saw the light ... everywhere. They learned the “extraordinary” light shines in the “ordinary” stuff of their daily life, like boats and nets and fish and salt and sea.

Everything is sacred. Or can be sacred ... or has the sacred in it.

We just have to see it. *We* just have to recognize it ...

in the face of the clerk at Food Lion,
in the water soaking through the dish cloth,
in the co-worker that annoys the devil out of you
and the family member who has wounded you,
in the autumn leaves and the spring blossoms,
in an email and a budget and a report,
in the waiting room,
in the changing of a diaper,
in the smile of a friend at church,
in a book,
in a song,
in a prayer,
in a loaf of bread and a chalice of wine ...

We are on Mount Tabor. The light is here.

We are invited to worship. We are called to serve.

We just have to remember the signs.

Amen.