

Empowered To Serve

CPR II, 2

Luke 9:28-36 28 About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. 29 As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. 30 Two men, Moses and Elijah, 31 appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. 32 Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 33 As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters-- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.) 34 While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." 36 When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen. (NIV)

Bill had undergone a serious operation and was still under the influence of the anesthesia when his pastor stopped by. Recognizing that Bill was not really awake, the pastor said a quick prayer with him and left. The next day, when the pastor returned, he asked Bill if he remembered his visit. Bill said, "I vaguely remember you coming by. I remember opening my eyes and thinking, 'I can't be in heaven -- my pastor is here!'"

Sometimes we go through life in a daze, only vaguely aware of what is happening around us. Today, as we come to the end of the season of Epiphany, I'd like to remind you what we have seen during this time. We knelt with the **Wise Men** who followed the star to Bethlehem; we stood on the **banks of the Jordan** to observe the Baptism of Jesus; we were astonished with the **wedding guests** when He changed water into wine. We have heard other accounts of how Jesus revealed Himself to be the Son of God. Today, the last Sunday after the Epiphany, **Transfiguration Sunday**, Jesus again reveals His glory, but our journey takes a new turn. Jerusalem is in view and all the suffering that lay ahead.

Our journey through life with Jesus is often joyous and easy: we celebrate births, rejoice at Baptisms and weddings, we exchange gifts. These are fun because they require little effort on our part. But not everything is that easy. We must face our "Jerusalems" as well. Life has trials and problems. A heart attack. A hospital stay where the word "Cancer" is part of the conversation. The sudden and unexpected loss of a job. A troubled or failed marriage. Children, both young and grown, who seem to be going against God rather than relying on Him in faith. Financial problems that seem to have no solution. We all have our difficulties we have to face. We need to pray to God for strength and seek His grace in His Word and Sacraments.

At the start of this text, we again find Jesus going to pray. He takes with Him the Inner Circle of disciples, Peter, James and John, the same three He will take to the Garden of Gethsemane. When Jesus goes to pray, He is going to the source to receive strength.

As the events begin to unfold, we find Moses and Elijah with Jesus in order to give Him a kind of "pep talk." They speak with Him about what He must go through in order to achieve our deliverance. Through His death, Jesus would accomplish a new exodus and lead His followers through death. Jesus had already told His disciples that *the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed* (V.22). The discussion He now holds with these prominent spokesmen for God from the Old Testament reminds Him that this path to salvation was chosen by Father before the foundation of the world. His whole purpose in life and in death, His mistreatment at the hands of sinners, His innocent suffering and death, all this was to forgive our sins. Because it was the will of His Father, He took upon Himself God's anger at your sin and mine. That includes everything we have done or failed to do: our lack of standing firm in Christ, our reluctance to deny ourselves, our failure to "take it to the Lord in prayer," our refusal to go down the mountain, our lack of humble service to one another in Christ's name. At Calvary the Son of God would take up the cross and suffer many things so that we might be forgiven and filled with God's power.

While Jesus is on the mount of Transfiguration praying, did you notice what the disciples were doing? It is almost as if they were rehearsing for the Garden of Gethsemane: they were dozing. They do not see the majestic events as they begin to unfold. But when they do become *fully awake* and recognize what is happening, they have a mountaintop experience. Peter wanted to pitch some tents and stay there, not wanting this event to end. But that was not the purpose God had in mind.

In the Transfiguration, not only was the glory of God revealed in Jesus. God the Father strengthens Jesus for His mission. The cloud of God's presence covers the mountain and people. This recalls the times in the Old Testament, especially in the Exodus and on Mt. Sinai, when God's presence among the people was tied to a cloud. From this cloud, God spoke. As He reminded Jesus of His unique position earlier at His Baptism, now He declares once more: *"This is my Son whom I have chosen"* to redeem the world. Jesus is God's "beloved", sent to love the world to death. No one else would do. The Father affirmed Jesus' mission and sent Him on to Jerusalem. With that strength He went down the mountain to serve and to die.

You and I need strength, too. We have our work to do on the other side of the mountain, our own little Jerusalems and Calvarys, our sin sickness and spiritual struggles. These may pale in comparison to what our Lord had to face, but they are nonetheless the tasks to which we have been called. Jesus calls us to deny ourselves and follow him (21-27). For this, we need the strength only God can give.

In the first Exodus, God led His people to the promised land. One way He made His presence known was in that pillar of cloud. He still leads His people today, and His presence empowers us. It may not be in a pillar of cloud, but we do enjoy His presence still today. We have our mountaintop experiences through the **Word and Sacraments**. Our Lord speaks to us plainly in His Word. We recall His name being placed on us in our Baptism. And we enjoy His presence in a special and unique way in Holy Communion. We are privileged to come and kneel at His altar to receive Christ Himself "in, with and under" the bread and wine. He is truly present, giving you the body and blood He offered to pay for your sins. That presence reminds and assures each of you that God loves you, that He has redeemed you, and that He will be with you.

When we think about the mountaintop experiences that we are privileged to share, we may think like Peter, wanting to savor the moment and pitch our tents so we can stay here. We want to drink in God's glory without any thought of service to Him. We have seen the face of Jesus through Word and Sacrament, and have caught a glimpse of a God that transforms our lives. Jesus leads us, then, to be new people, to go down the mountain and serve Him in the valley of life's problems. But we do not go alone. We go down from the mountain confident of God's **abiding presence**.

**Tis good, Lord, to be here. Yet we may not remain;
But since Thou bidst us leave the mount, Come with us to the plain.**

As you go, remember that when you need help, you can come to your fellow believers. Part of that life of service to which we are called is to **carry each others burdens** (Gal 6:2). Members of the body of Christ serve Him by responding to the needs of others as Christ would respond. That starts right here. At a minimum, we pray for one another. We should also offer other assistance to our brothers and sisters in Christ as it is needed. The presence of God in our lives empowers us to serve not just those who are far away. We serve by showing Christ's love to those around us, starting with those sitting in these pews here this morning, and going out from there.

We live this way in the knowledge that Jesus will call us one day to embark on that final exodus to heavenly glory. So we descend the mountain with a deeper faith, strengthened by the vision of Christ, confident of His presence with us, empowered to serve.