

Last Epiphany C  
February 27, 2022

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Do we have any hikers here this morning?

Hiking can be a tremendously rewarding activity. You can spend hours on a steep trail working your way through thick woods only to come to a clearing to be embraced by a view that literally takes your breath away.

Sometimes, you may not have any great goal in mind, but are out there simply to enjoy the journey, taking in the exercise and the fresh air, enjoying the company of friends in the beauty of God's creation.

However, we also know that there are those "other times", times that can be described simply as misery: You trip on a branch and twist your ankle six miles from your next camping site. Clouds of mosquitos descend and no amount of bug spray will deter them. Storm clouds roll in unexpectedly and all of a sudden you are drenched to the skin and chilled to the bone.

When you stop to think about it, hiking is really a metaphor for life, isn't it? Sometimes things are going along great. Life is beautiful and there is really only joy in our work and in our relationships. Other times, no matter what we say or do, it feels as if we are constantly defeated, beaten down and overwhelmed by all that life is throwing at us. There is a lot about this life that resembles a mountain trail. There are "ups" and there are "downs".

Welcome this morning to our celebration of what we have come to call the Transfiguration. Again, this is the last Sunday of the Epiphany season. The season of Lent is now only days away. Make sure you make the most of your "Alleluias" this morning!

Luke tells us that we are meeting up with Jesus, Peter, James, and John after six days on the trail. It has been six days since Peter reached the greatest of heights in recognizing Jesus by responding to his question, "But who do you say that I am?" with the declaration that "You are the Messiah". And it has been six days since Peter has been utterly crushed by Jesus' rebuke, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

In one moment, Peter had recognized that Jesus was the fulfillment of all that God had promised to his people over the centuries. In the next, he was trying to talk Jesus out of the divine mission only to be completely shut down. Talk about your highs and lows.

So here we are, six days later. Peter, James, and John following Jesus to God knows where. Can you imagine how Peter is feeling?

And then, all of a sudden, there on that mountaintop, Jesus is “transfigured” before them. It’s not a word we use very often, but it has much in common with the Greek term, “metamorphosis”. In that moment, Jesus was completely changed before them and they are seeing him in his eternal glory. Up to this moment, they had known him as teacher, as a healer and worker of miracles, as the carpenter from Nazareth whose mother was Mary. He had been, in every sense, fully human. But now he stands before them in full radiance, as Son of God.

If that were not enough, two of the greatest characters of the Hebrew Scriptures are also standing before them on either side of God’s Son. Moses, representing the Law and Elijah, representing the Prophets are conversing with Jesus about the very mission that Peter had only recently tried to talk him out of. I think that we can forgive Peter and the others for feeling absolutely terrified. They have no idea as to how to respond so Peter starts babbling something about building dwellings for these three super-luminaries.

And then, there it is. The cloud overshadows them and God, yes that God, speaks to them: “This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!” No wonder Peter wants to enshrine the moment. This is the ultimate mountaintop experience. This is like coming to the greatest vista ever with all of eternity in view. Why would you ever want it to come to an end?

But it does come to an end. All of a sudden, those four are once again on their own and Jesus is once again the carpenter from Nazareth. They are heading back down the trail now on their way to the final destination in Jerusalem.

You and I are like Peter in so many ways. We much prefer the grace of the Christian faith over the sacrifice that it also embodies. We much prefer the joy of Christmas over the sorrow the Passion. We much prefer the reward of Easter over the cost of discipleship. We much prefer the mountain heights over the shadow of the valley of death. Thankfully, for us, Jesus was willing to hike the entire trail.

We’re leaving the high mountain of the church year today. We’re entering into Lent where we will have to face all of our sins and self-deceit head on. It may not be comfortable. It may not be fun. But it is, for your sake and mine, absolutely necessary. No more “Alleluias” for the time being. Not until Easter Day. Instead, we must try as best we can to keep close to Jesus. We must let him take us by the hand as he leads us to Good Friday’s cross and the moment of our healing, the moment of our reconciliation, the moment of our transfiguration. The trail won’t be easy. But if we really want to know what God hopes for us and desires us to be, it is the only road to take. Amen.