

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Amen.

The transfiguration of Jesus that we read of in this morning's gospel has so many lessons for us in how we see Jesus and how we see ourselves. I like to retell this story through the eyes of the disciples who witnessed it, because I think we can easily put ourselves in their place.

Peter, James and John have become close to Jesus, following him in his ministry throughout Galilee. He is their teacher, but also, I believe, their friend. He has stayed in their homes; they've walked together, eaten together; for Peter, James and John, their expanding relationship with Jesus is also expanding their relationship with God. Listening to Jesus' parables, and learning from him as he wrestles with the meaning of the law with those who come to him with questions, is slowly and gradually opening their eyes to a different way of seeing God, seeing Jesus, and seeing themselves.

This different way of seeing becomes physical and concrete when Jesus takes them up on the mountain. Suddenly they see their friend, as someone far more than a remarkable healer and teacher. Some days prior to this event, Jesus had asked them, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter had replied, “You are the Messiah”; but what did that mean to Peter? Jesus was God’s anointed, but what was Jesus anointed to do? If he was chosen to redeem Israel, did that mean he would get rid of the Roman occupation? Would Jesus be the head of an earthly kingdom, like David was?

Peter, James and John find themselves confronted with seeing Jesus in a way that they may not have entirely been prepared for, nor that they entirely understand at first. On the mountain, they are given a glimpse of Jesus’ divinity. Their friend and teacher becomes a dazzling image that speaks to Moses and Elijah in an overwhelming display of God’s presence that they could relate to the account in Exodus when God descends in a cloud on the holy mountain. Peter, James and John are terrified. And suddenly, they find themselves alone with their friend Jesus; the glimpse of the divine world is gone, and they are left to make their way back down the dusty mountain with their familiar teacher and healer; but of course,

everything may *look* the same, but in reality all is quite different, and the disciples, in time, must learn to see things differently.

Peter, James and John have been given a glimpse of Jesus' divine nature; on their way back down the mountain, even as Jesus appears fully human to them, they now also hold the vision of Jesus fully divine. The voice of God in that enveloping cloud has told them the identity of their friend and teacher: God's Son, the Beloved. The disciples have been given a new way of seeing Jesus; but I also think, they've been challenged to see themselves differently.

We usually equate the presence of Moses and Elijah on that mountain as representing the law and the prophets, which they very much do. But I also think their presence can represent more than that. Moses was chosen to *liberate* God's children; and Elijah, as we heard in this morning's reading, was a man literally caught up in the fire of the Spirit. These are two of the qualities that Jesus brings with him in his ministry; the work of liberation and the fire of the Spirit do not stay up on the mountain with Moses and Elijah; these two qualities come down the mountain with Jesus, walking right alongside Peter, James and John. We and the disciples have to ask

ourselves: How are we taking the ministry of liberation to the crowd waiting for us at the foot of the mountain? How are we inviting the fire of the Spirit to swirl around us and touch the lives of everyone within our reach?

Jesus liberates through healing, freeing us from the unclean spirits - those harmful ways of thinking and being that control our behaviour - Jesus liberates us from the ways of thinking and being that diminish our own humanity and alienate us from divinity. Jesus promises and freely gives the gift of the Spirit, a fiery gift which can give us the strength, wisdom, and a deeper way of seeing that allows us to meet the challenges of living out our faith in a world that has turned aside from the way of love.

Jesus is placed on the mountain of the transfiguration two beings who can represent the call of God to liberate and the fire of the Spirit to carry out that work. The challenge to Peter, James and John, and the challenge to us, is that when we follow Jesus, we are called to embody these very qualities that walked down the mountain with him. Jesus invites us to accept the liberation from whatever enslaves us, diminishing our humanity and divorcing us from divinity; then Jesus calls us to bring that liberation into the world, whether we're engaging with one another, or reforming the

systems which shape our lives. Jesus offers us the fiery gift of the Spirit; then Jesus calls us to allow that Spirit to move through us, transforming us, so that we can bring our whole healed selves, heart, soul and might into the will of God, and so that everything we do moves us forward into a greater, more just, and more loving world. May it be so.