

The Last Sunday of the Epiphany, Year C  
February 7, 2016  
St. Martin's Episcopal Church  
The Reverend Dr. Kathleen V. Price, Priest in Charge

This is that last Sunday of the Epiphany season. The gospel for this Sunday is the same in all three years.

The transfiguration story reveals the person of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ.

God tells us then, and now, Jesus is the Son of God, chosen by God to be the way in which the world is saved from the power of sin and death.

The law and the prophets are the foundation of the Old Covenant the foundation of the New Covenant is the person of Christ.

The transfiguration identifies Jesus with the past, the Old Covenant, but it also foreshadows the future, Jesus' death on the cross.

In the account in Matthew, Moses and Elijah discuss with Jesus his "departure", or, in the Greek, his exodus, which means both death and departure.

This connects Jesus death with the great exodus from Egypt when God delivered the Hebrew people out of bondage.

This new exodus will also be one of death, departure, and deliverance.

The transfiguration anticipates the death of Jesus, but it also hints that that death will not be the last word.

Once again, the people of God will be delivered out of the hand of the enemy.

The change in Jesus' appearance is tangible evidence and an assurance of God's power, God's glory.

Jesus' face and clothes become dazzling white – as had Moses'.

This change is a physical demonstration that Jesus is more than human, he is the divine Christ, the anointed one, the one to save the people again.

God speaks out of the cloud, as He did at Jesus' baptism, as He did to the Hebrews in the dessert.

In this story, we have been confronted with the tension between the humanity of Jesus and the divinity of Christ.

The transfiguration story brings us face to face with physical evidence that Jesus is more than a great first century rabbi...Jesus is the Son of God...the incarnation of God... the word made flesh to dwell among us, yes, but more than flesh, Jesus is also divine.

If you don't fully understand that, it's okay.

Neither do I...neither did the disciples...neither did the early church.

Some of the major heresies revolved around this issue.

Arianism teaches that Jesus was a creature like the rest of us; that He was only human.

Appollinarianism teaches that Christ has no human spirit, but was only divine.

The Nestorians teach that Christ is two separate and distinct persons, one human person, one divine person.

The Monophysites teach that Christ is one person with two separate and distinct natures, one human, one divine.

Those heresies are not dead.

Many today accept Jesus as a great teacher and prophet, but not as a person of the Trinity.

Unitarians and Universalists do not accept Jesus as divine though they read the Bible and accept His teachings.

Orthodox teaching, accepted at the Council of Nicaea and reinforced at the Council of Chalcedon is what we profess to believe...but still don't fully comprehend.

Jesus is of the same substance with the Father...Jesus is God, fully divine.

Jesus also has a complete human nature...that is, Jesus is also fully man.

Jesus is one person acting through two natures, both divine and human.

If Jesus is only human, we have a friend and teacher, but no savior to redeem us.

If Christ is only divine, we have no God who suffers as we suffer.

We can strive to understand this...I can tell you the big words and give you the definitions I learned at seminary. However, not one of us, not even my theology professors, fully comprehend the mystery of God.

For God to be God, there must be an element of divine mystery... a part of the story that defies our understanding because we are limited by our own humanity.

God is not limited to our understanding.

God knew that then...God knows that now.

God sought to reveal His glory in the presence of some of the disciples.

Jesus' body is like that of other human beings, but it shines with a radiance that is beyond humanity, physical evidence of the divine mystery.

It was important for the disciples to begin to understand this unique nature, both human and divine, so that they could begin to understand the Easter events to follow.

It is important for us to try to understand this unique nature so that we can begin to understand how the death and resurrection of Christ impacts upon our own lives.

Coming right before the season of Lent, this gives us something to ponder for the next forty days. The transfiguration gives us a practical reassurance that the death on the cross will be a victory over death... that the pain and suffering of the cross will be redeemed by the saving power of the resurrected Christ.

The transfiguration helps us to live in the hope that God transforms hearts and lives so that even in the midst of pain and suffering, we can look beyond that to Christ' promise to be there in the midst of it with us... on the mountaintop and in the valley.

God knew, for the disciples and for us, that the challenges one faces make it difficult to hold onto faith without some reassuring sign.

We no longer have the physical appearance of Christ with us, but the divine mystery of the Eucharist can give us that same assurance, that same promise of hope. Peter, faced with the glory of the divine mystery, exclaimed "Lord, it is good for us to be here."

God's glory still shines forth in the world... and it is good for us to be here... that we, too, might be transformed by the light of Christ.

We are transformed, not by a trip up a mountain, but a trip down the aisle up to the altar where we receive the body and blood of Christ.

We believe these elements to have the power to transform us.

When I sat in the pews at Bruton Parish, before I was ordained, I used to watch people as they came back down the aisle from communion.

They had been transformed.

They had just received what will nurture and sustain us through life and death.

This is a power drink and food like no other.

But few looked transformed, few looked moved, few looked even happy.

Think about this.

You are a Christian. You have been given the power of the Holy Spirit.

You have been fed with spiritual food. Jesus Christ is with and in you.

Shouldn't it show?

Now, from the other end of the aisle, I love to watch your faces as you receive.

If you would wear your name tags, I choose to call each of you by name – a bonus.

Some of you make eye contact. A few of you smile. Only the children beam – one or two of them may say thank you!

Think about it.

Are you just going through the motions, following the little crowd at the altar rail, or is this a journey that transforms your heart and your life?

If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands, stomp your feet – or if that's too charismatic for you, smile!

In the sound of sheer silence, listen, that you might hear, believe, and come to understand and react to the best news you will ever hear, the best meal you will ever enjoy!

Thanks be to God.

Let the people say "Amen".