

Last Sunday After Epiphany, February 26, 2006, Liturgical Year "B"

St. Bartholomew's Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins, Curate

Scripture: Mark 9:2-9

"I Can See Clearly, Now!"

A Child gets a microscope – and starts to explore another world that couldn't be seen prior to this. What up until this time appeared to be a drop of water – now held so much more to be seen.

Just looking through the lens of a telescope can reveal a marvelous view of the heavens that God created – which prior to looking through it remained unseen.

A radio disk jockey – who will remain unnamed – spent 28 years playing hit songs and thought he knew all of them, until he found that there was more. Through different eyes – he finds another world of contemporary Christian music – that has existed for years – but for him - prior to this - was totally unseen and unheard. He would spend the next 3 and final years of his radio career playing only Contemporary Christian "oldies."

Have you ever been on an airplane? Do you remember the first time you flew above the clouds – and you could see how everything looked from up above? I am sure it was an awesome sight!

In today's Gospel reading, Peter, James and John were amazed by and fascinated with the transfiguration of Jesus. I don't know if you noticed it, but if you carefully read Mark's description of the transfigured Jesus, it is so remarkably similar to the description of the risen Christ in the New Testament resurrection accounts. If you take into consideration verse nine of today's gospel, where Jesus tells his disciples, as they are going back down the mountain, that they are not to tell anyone about what they've seen until after he had risen from the dead; I think it is safe to draw the conclusion that the transfiguration event is a glimpse into and a preparation for the future - of Jesus' death on the cross and His glorious resurrection.

Sometimes it is not until much later in life that we come to see the purpose of all of the events of our lives and how they all fit together. It is then that we realize how God works through those events to get us ready for the future. **I always like to say that when you look into the rear view mirror of your life – you can see God's fingerprints everywhere, on everything.** Sometimes we experience what you might consider "mountaintop experiences," which prepare us for the future. When we, like Jesus and his disciples, face our hardships and the crosses that we are to bear, we can draw comfort and strength as we remember such an exciting and wonderful mountain top perspective.

Sometimes - we have some difficulty, just like the disciples did, in getting the clarity or real meaning of this mountain top perspective.

Here's a good example:

A worker asked for a pay raise and got this note back from his supervisor: "*Because of the fluctuation predisposition of your position's productive capacity as juxtaposed to standard norms, it would be momentarily injudicious to advocate your requested increment.*" The puzzled worker went to the supervisor and said, "*If this is about my pay raise, I don't get it.*" "*That's right,*" said the supervisor. "*You don't get it!*"

All of us truly need the "vision" of the mountaintop:

- All of us need transforming experiences in our lives,

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- where our entire perspective is changed,
- the fog is gone,
- the veil is lifted,
- the microscopic becomes visible,
- the fuzzy becomes sharper,
- and we see more clearly.

If we stop and reflect upon our lives, it is quite likely we’ve all had such eye opening experiences just as Peter, James, and John did – only maybe not on quite as grand or holy a scale. We can probably identify as well with Peter in today’s gospel, when he tries to capture and prolong this heaven sent experience by offering to make three dwellings – one each for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. It is almost comic relief – to think of the awe of this moment – and here is Peter wanting to make this a Kodak moment of sorts. You can always count on Peter – God Bless him!

So, let’s borrow from Peter’s idea – and remain in the moment for just a little while longer. Let’s take a closer look at what happened.

- The awe of this mountaintop experience or vision contains more than “just any old mountaintop” can hold.
- Jesus is changed, transformed, and transfigured into a vision whose clothes are dazzling white. This change was quite physical – as the account in Luke 9:29 tells: “*the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white.*”
- The disciples were seeing Jesus as they had never seen Him before – and then
- He is joined by Elijah and Moses – they didn’t know what to think.
- Matthew’s account in chapter 17, just like the others from Luke and Mark, indicates that the disciples were terrified. They didn’t know what to expect next. They were on a roller coaster and they didn’t have a clue as to where it was going.

Just before this magnificent event occurred – which by the way is thought to have happened on Mount Hermon – right near Caesarea Philippi, Peter identified Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

- Peter spoke the TRUTH at Caesarea Philippi
- and now he was seeing the TRUTH on the mountain – the actual living proof with his very own eyes.

He and the others present - were **clearly seeing** - right before them - the unabated heavenly appearance of – Jesus Christ - God Incarnate. Oh, and by the way – they were really seeing Jesus meeting with Moses and Elijah as well! Somehow they recognized them – after all they had been dead for hundreds of years – but **somehow they knew them** in all of God’s glory. Oh my goodness! Somehow their **vision had not only become clearer**, but **more magnified as well** – seeing two of the major prophets from all of the Holy Scripture – standing with the very one who fulfills their prophecies – Jesus of Nazareth! Elijah represented all of the prophets from the Old Testament – all who throughout Scripture pointed to the coming Messiah – and Moses represented the Law – given by God to mankind – which was now fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Can you imagine the range of emotions that Peter, James and John had to be feeling?

But wait – we’re not done yet!

God is doing something remarkable here – and in order to see it more clearly – we need to seek God’s Word. We need to look back to the Book of Exodus, chapter 13 verses 21 and 22 – when God led the

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Israelites as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Verse 22 says that “*Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.*” And now here - God is sending a cloud, which overshadows the three witnesses to the transfiguration – and God Himself speaks.

- God, who **spoke to Moses on the mountain** revealing Himself as “I AM who I AM, – speaks to Peter, James, and John.
- God, whom we read about in today’s Old Testament lesson from 1 Kings, who **spoke to Elijah on a mountain** – and then speaks to Peter, James, and John **also on a mountain** – saying “*This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!*”

Debate this all you want – but I can’t figure out why people attentively listen to a TV commercial about “when E.F. Hutton speaks everybody listens” – but when God speaks it becomes a big question of – do you really believe this? Do you really think that God speaks?

My brothers and sisters in Christ, **when God speaks --- you only get the TRUTH!** Not only did God show the disciples a clear, inarguable view of who Jesus is – but God Almighty came right out and said it - Himself.

- Jesus, God’s only begotten Son, whom God loves, should be the only voice from that time forward that we should listen to.
- Jesus is the Way, The Truth, and the Life – We need to “*Listen to Him!*”

What more proof do you need? But indeed throughout the centuries – many people would rather question the truth than believe it. Something more has to happen! God gave Peter, James, and John the ultimate mountaintop experience – and yet – they couldn’t take it with them – but the memories would live on.

Like Peter, James and John – we also have come to realize that we cannot live on the mountaintop forever. The laws of gravity rule - even on the mountaintop – for “what goes up – must come down.” The valleys summon us to come down and live our lives as servants with other believers — just as Jesus had to do, along with Peter, James and John.

Jesus and his disciples, like Moses and the Israelites, descended to the valleys of life to serve and give of themselves. The mountaintop had given them the clarity of vision and prepared them all for loving service of others. The same is true of us.

Isn’t it remarkable what a clearer vision will do?

An Illustration:

One day a 35 year-old insurance salesman came to the Vision Rehabilitation Clinic in Providence, Rhode Island. He had only 1% vision since age ten. He had gone through life in a gray shadow. When a pair of magnifier glasses was slipped into place, his jaw dropped in amazement. Then he exploded, ‘Oh praise God, look at what I can see!’ After all these years, it’s a miracle, the greatest thing that ever happened!’ Minutes later he phoned his wife and said, ‘Honey, I’m coming home to see what you *really* look like!’

Isn’t it remarkable what a clearer vision will do?

It can remind us, in the midst of our real lives, that there is more out there than we realize, that there is a goal, that there is hope, and that what you see, thanks be to God, is not all that you get.

After the Transfiguration - Jesus led Peter, James, and John down the mountain, and the long journey to Jerusalem began. Jesus told the disciples not to tell anyone what they had seen “until after the Son

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of Man had risen from the dead. You see, the mountaintop experience did not and could not take the place of the sacrifice that Jesus would make on the cross – but it could fill them and others, including us, with the hope that what had been seen and heard was real and so was the promise of eternal life with Christ.

We are given the remarkable account of the Transfiguration of Jesus in three of the Gospels, and then we are blessed with a fourth from one of the eyewitnesses – who was there on the mountain. Peter wanted to make sure that he left his words, as a sign of the truth in this account of that mountaintop vision. His words from 2 Peter 1:15-21 remain with us to help us to more clearly see the truth: *“And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”*

The vision of the Transfiguration, gifts of glory, moments of the presence of God, the special times, whatever they may be, are given to us as a light on the road. They are given to us to help when things get dark, or perhaps worse, when things get ordinary and dull and we seem to be right back where we started.

God is the source of our strength and hope. There may be a time in our lives when we may be asked to go up to a mountain top experience with Jesus. Whether we are one of those who are taken to the mountain top, or whether we are one of those, like the rest of the other disciples, who stay behind and wait, we are all called to the same road, and the same journey. **And we are never alone – for our journey is with Jesus Christ.**

Let us Pray: Heavenly Father, may our mountaintop experiences help us to know and see Jesus more clearly; in order that we may follow Your Holy Will, in lives of loving service of others. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.