

## **Sermon, Father William J. Albinger**

**Sunday February 14, 2010**

Last Epiphany C 2010

*(Sermon delivered from notes – this is a recreation):*

In the name of one living God who creates abundantly, loves extravagantly and sustains eternally: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This Sunday is the last Sunday in Epiphany – the season of the Church year when we consider the manifestation of God’s power and presence in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The lessons selected are meant to do a lot of theological reflection. They seek to answer the big “so what?” question about the meaning of Christmas. It’s helpful to review the gospel lessons of Epiphany season because they do a lot of Bible talk:

The baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan River rings out in Jewish memory Moses leading his people to the banks of the Jordan and their crossing into the Promised Land. God acting to deliver God’s people. Jesus’ choosing his first disciples would remind Jewish ears of the many times God called the Patriarchs and the Prophets to lead God’s people into new lives and renewal.

The changing of water into wine at the marriage feast at Cana and the abundant catch of fish remind us of other times God has acted in greatness to provide for God’s people. It seems that when God acts to help us, God is no piker – God acts extravagantly.

So now Luke takes us, along with Peter, James and John, to follow Jesus up a mountain to go pray. Mountaintops are particular places. They allow us to scan the horizon and see the whole panorama – what is behind us and what lies ahead. They are also “thin places” to use a Celtic term. Places where God is particularly accessible and close, ready to pop out at a moment’s notice.

I don’t know what the disciples were thinking as they followed Jesus up the increasingly

steep path. Probably they weren't expecting much at all, just another quiet time of prayer and reflection. Boy, did they get a surprise! They experienced what I learned in seminary is called a theophany – a physical manifestation in real time and space of the presence of the living God. Jesus suddenly became luminous – like the burning bush – and along side him were Moses and Elijah discussing Jesus' departure in Jerusalem. Now, Moses and Elijah aren't just any old figures. They go to the core of God's relationship with the Israelites. They immediately conjure up the stories of times when God responded and became present and acted in human history. Luke, here, is reaching way back into the corporate memory of the Jewish people to make a bold statement about Jesus. According to Jewish tradition in those days, both Elisha and Moses were believed to have been taken alive up into heaven. Their reappearance would signal to Jews the arrival of God's kingdom on earth.

Luke also gives us a look into human nature. Good ol' Peter is always Exhibit A when it comes to human foibles. Startled by this sudden and powerful apparition which he doesn't understand, Peter attempts to take control of the situation and starts babbling on about building booths for all three to memorialize and record this event. Peter doesn't know what to say but that doesn't stop him! Peter is missing the point. He wants to take control back from God. He wants to enshrine the experience. He wants to freeze it in the past. God will have none of this. Giving Peter the equivalent of a crack to the head, a voice comes out of the cloud, "This is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to him!"

I think Luke's account of the Transfiguration conveys a great Biblical truth. Being faithful is not accomplished by enshrining an experience of God and freezing that moment in the past. Faithfulness is allowing the moment to pass but to follow on confident that God is with us leading the way and that the future is greater than what we have already experienced. In the stories about the Patriarchs in the Book of Genesis, God could appear anywhere. When he did, they marked the spot, but they didn't linger there. They moved forward in confidence that God

is with them.

There is another important biblical lesson expressed here. When God shows up in our lives, it is not primarily for our benefit. God blessed Abraham not for his own sake but rather that he should be a blessing to others. Moses was stopped by the burning bush and commanded to bring his people out of Egypt not only for their sake but so that they might become a light to the nations. Luke, great storyteller that he is, is putting us right up there on the mountain with Peter. Whatever we get out of this is intended to equip us so that we may bring healing and health to a world in need.

So God gives Peter a commandment: “This is my Son, my Chosen: Listen to Him!” That is our commandment also. Jesus show Peter the way by leaving the mountaintop. He encounters another father with an only son – a father who desperately begs Jesus to heal his convulsing son. Jesus does heal him and the account concludes “And all were astounded at the greatness of God.”

We are leaving Epiphany Season and entering Lent this Wednesday – Ash Wednesday. Just before Luke’s account of the Transfiguration, Luke tells of Jesus’ first prediction of his death. Jesus is looking from that mountaintop across to another hill outside of Jerusalem. Like all of us, he may well have yearned to stay on that mountaintop of bliss. But he knew that that was not what God wanted. He knew that the experience wasn’t just for him. And so he led his disciples down the mountain toward Jerusalem.

And along the way he took compassion on a father with a sick child and healed him. “And all were astounded at the greatness of God.” Jesus was teaching them that God doesn’t want monuments when God shows up. God wants disciples who are themselves transfigured into people of compassion and healing to bring the shining into the world.

Amen.