



SAINT LUKE'S

LAST EPIPHANY
YEAR B

2 KINGS 2:1-12
2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-6
MARK 9:2-9
PSALM 50:1-6

A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM OGBURN
FEBRUARY 11, 2018

✠ In the Name of God: Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is the last Sunday after the Epiphany, the last Sunday before Lent begins on Wednesday this coming week. On this Sunday before Lent, the Gospel lesson is always an account of the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain. To better understand what happens at the Transfiguration of Jesus, it's helpful to know what happens just before this. Six days prior, Jesus has a conversation with the disciples and makes clear to them that he understands that he will suffer, that he will die, and that, despite that, he must go to Jerusalem anyway. Jesus knows that the good news he brings of God's love and God's faithfulness is not what the world wants to hear ~ and that the world will kill him for it. Peter tries to stop him ~ and Jesus says to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life. Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?"

So then it is six days later ~ and Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain. Jesus is transfigured before them with his face shining and his clothes dazzling white. Showing that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the the one who was foretold by the prophets, Moses and Elijah appear with him. And then a cloud overshadows them and they hear God's voice say, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Then they suddenly find themselves alone with Jesus once again.

The Transfiguration is a glorious demonstration to the disciples that Jesus is

God's Son and they need to listen to what he says. The Transfiguration is not for the benefit of Jesus; it is for the faith of the disciples. This is an added dimension of the glory of God's Christ. It is yet another divine affirmation that they can trust that Jesus is God's anointed One and that they need to do what he tells them. Jesus has told them that to follow him, they must take up their cross and follow him, even if it means death. The Transfiguration is a foretaste of the resurrection and everlasting life in God. The disciples are given a preview of the glory of Jesus in the Kingdom of God – and they see that this warrants obedience to the splendor of Christ's majesty. But Jesus knows that the way won't be easy. Jesus knows that there is a long way to go ~ a hard and difficult road that will lead to death ~ but this Epiphany, this Transfiguration, promises greater life in God on the other side of death.

All of the Gospel lessons for this season are epiphanies about who Jesus is as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ. They remind us that Jesus is God's anointed One who has come into the world to teach us to walk in God's ways, to love with God's love, and to seek God with all our hearts. These lessons from Epiphany reveal to us the light of Christ, who has come to scatter the darkness of our sins and to shine within our hearts so that others may see the path and follow where Jesus leads.

When the light of the world comes into our lives, it is a good thing because we see reality. But in our human nature, we like the darkness because we can hide. But in Christ's light, there is no hiding. In Christ's light, our sins, our brokenness...all is revealed. It's visible. It's all known. And then we see it, name, and acknowledge and confess it, we then have the opportunity to

clean up the mess and put things to right. That's the work of reconciliation.

The light of Christ has been passed from one generation to another. And in some generations, there are those who have bigger candles than others. There are saints whose hearts burn so bright with the light of Christ's love that nothing can hide that light. Absalom Jones was one of those bright lights. Absalom Jones' feast day is this coming Tuesday ~ but the Diocese of New York came together yesterday to celebrate his feast day a bit early. Absalom Jones was the first African American priested in The Episcopal Church. In brief, he was born a slave in 1746. He taught himself to read and write. He bought his wife's freedom before later buying his own. After his Church in Philadelphia raised money to expand its seating capacity, the leadership decided to segregate the black worshippers from the whites without notification. Most of the black worshippers walk out together and left. They founded St. Thomas' Church and in 1794 in Philadelphia ~ and in 1795 Jones was ordained a deacon and in 1802, he was ordained to the priesthood. He preached against the evils of slavery. He preached that God always acts on "behalf of the oppressed and distressed." He is a shining example of persistence in faith and perseverance in following Jesus in the way that leads to God. Absalom Jones is also a testament to the fact that we need so much more than just a month each year to honor black history.

As followers of Jesus, taking up our cross means denying ourselves and giving up on going our own way. It means that we proclaim Christ and not ourselves, as our Epistle today says. The mystery of the cross is giving up our lives in God's service so that we all may have fuller life in God. Shining lights, like Absalom Jones, remind us too that as children of the light, we can't

compromise with darkness. It means when we see evil, we must shine light. We must make it known. We must name it. And we must put an end to it. Slavery was a huge thing to overcome. But as we know all too well, with movements like *Black Lives Matter* and *Me too* the fight against evil is still very real. Evil is real in racism. Evil is real in sexism and misogyny. Evil is real in homophobia. Evil is real in Transphobia. Evil is real in any form of oppression. In our baptism, we renounce the “evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God” and we are handed a candle, lit from the Paschal candle, as a symbol of our promise to fight evil with the light of Jesus’ love. There are so many dark places where we need the light of Jesus Christ to shine...to scatter the darkness and root out evil.

The Transfiguration of Jesus shows us that Jesus is God’s chosen One, God’s beloved ~ and that we should listen to him, follow where he leads, and allow his light to shine within our hearts. The Epiphany, Jesus’ baptism, his miracles, his transfiguration all point to his resurrection on the other side of Lent. But we can’t get to resurrection without 40 days in the wilderness, without betrayal, without scourging, without crucifixion. We must be reminded about what it means to look for, name, and root out the bitterness of selfishness and callousness of oppression – and to know that this will cost us our lives in the process. This is what makes room for the new light of Jesus Christ to shine in our hearts ~ and that gives us every reason to joyfully sing alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

✠ In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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