



SAINT LUKE'S

LAST SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
YEAR A

EXODUS 24:12-18
2 PETER 1:16-21
MATTHEW 17:1-9
PSALM 2 OR 99

A SERMON BY THE REV. WILLIAM OGBURN

FEBRUARY 26, 2017

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

During this season of Epiphany, the Gospel lessons focus on the messiahship of Jesus. The Magi come and worship the Christchild, bearing 'solemn gifts of mystic meaning' and they then worship him. At Jesus' baptism by John in the river Jordan, the Holy Spirit alights on him like a dove and a voice from heaven says, "This is my Son, my beloved in whom I am well pleased." In year C, we hear about the miracle at Cana, where Jesus turns water into wine. These kinds of stories about Jesus all remind us that, in addition to his humanity, Jesus is also divine. 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. 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.

Today is the last Sunday after the Epiphany, the last Sunday before Lent begins. On this Sunday, 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 knows he will suffer and that he must go to Jerusalem anyway. Peter tries to stop him - and Jesus says to him, "If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, they must leave themselves behind; they must take up their cross and come follow me. Whoever cares for their own safety is lost; but if they will lose themselves for my sake, they will find their true selves. What will they gain by winning the whole world, at the cost of

their true self? Or what will one give that one can buy that self back.”

Then six days later, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain. Jesus is transfigured before them with his face shining and his clothes dazzling white. Bringing to mind the law and the prophets, Moses and Elijah appear and then a cloud overshadows them and they hear God’s voice say, “This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him.” Then they fall down on their faces in terror, and Jesus bids them stand up and to not be afraid.

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 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 come with him. 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.

At my last parish in Rhode Island, I lived in an adorable Victorian cottage. The only downside to this place was the dark, creepy cellar. It was cold and dirty from age. I made it a point never to go down there, unless I absolutely have to. One Christmas day, I had to go down to haul out my Christmas decorations. The light bulb in the stairwell had gone out, so I

took with me a flashlight. Now, I have to tell you, I hate spiders and their webs. And when I took out the flashlight I saw spiders crawling and other creepy things moving and I grabbed my Christmas box bolted up stairs and shut the door.

When Christ, the light of the world, comes into our lives, scattering our darkness, the light is wonderful because we can see everything. But while seeing what we want to see (like the Christmas box) we also see the creepy-crawly things in our lives that scare us. Light shows us a new a reality and most of us are not very happy with what we see. And none of us likes to be shone our faults and our shortcoming. But Christ's light shines to show us who we really are...and sometimes we don't like that... but the light of Christ's majesty drives away evil and reclaims us as children of the Light.

Cleaning up, cleaning out, restoring what's broken in the messiness of our hearts is the work of Lent, which is upon us. The season of Epiphany, bookended by Jesus' baptism and transfiguration, affirms for us that we can trust that Jesus is God's beloved Son, in whom God is well-pleased – and that we should listen to him. It is assurance that we can follow Christ's light to even the darkest of places. And as his light shines in and through us, we are faced with the hard interior soul work of cleaning out the creepy-crawly things that that thrive in the darkness.

The light of Christ shining in our hearts is also transformational. We live differently because of that light. And in the light, certain things that were once hidden can come to light in new ways. If you have not seen the film *Hidden Figures*, I highly recommend it. It is based on a true story about three

African-American women in the who were mathematical, programming, and engineering geniuses working for segregated NASA in the 1960s and their integral work in the success of the space program. Stories like this expose truth and oppression. Christ's light breaks down oppression one story at a time. And we must keep telling stories like these to show that we do not have to live with oppressive systems of racism and sexism. Living into the light of Christ means being courageous in naming these systems and 'isms' and working to break them down at every level. That is our birthright as Children of Light.

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. This is what makes room for the new light of Jesus Christ to shine in our hearts ~ and that gives us every reason to sing with joy alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

THE CHURCH OF ST. LUKE IN THE FIELDS
487 HUDSON STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10014

TEL: 212.924.0562

FAX: 212. 633.2098

WEB SITE: WWW.STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG

EMAIL: INFO@STLUKEINTHEFIELDS.ORG