



St. Andrew's By-the-Sea
The Episcopal Church
in Destin, Florida

“Go up that mountain with Peter, James, and John”

Last Epiphany – February 11, 2024

Mark 1:21-28

A Homily by The Rev'd Jo Popham

Let's take a trip together this morning. Go up that mountain with Jesus, with Peter, James, and John. Imagine with me that we were with him when a Gentile woman of Syrophenician origin begged Jesus to cast the demon out of her daughter. And Jesus learned from that encounter that he was called to serve all people, not just the sons and daughters of Israel.¹ We heard him speak “Ephphatha – be opened” to that deaf mute. And we were amazed.² We were with him as he healed so many. Remember when he fed five thousand who had followed him for three days; he fed them all with seven small loaves of bread and a few fish, and 12 baskets of leftovers were collected. He restored sight to the blind. We knew who he was before we went up to the mountain top. He was the Messiah, as Peter confessed when he asked us all who he was. We know this Jesus. We have walked so many miles with him. How many pair of Birkenstocks have we worn out on the dusty rocky roads he has led us down? We know his mother and his brothers. We have seen him hungry and tired and footsore, just like all the rest of us. We know who Jesus is.

But then he led Peter and James and John up the mountain. We followed at a distance, for Jesus had not invited us precisely. We felt welcome to go with him ever since he first called us to follow him, but this day was going to be different.

When they got to the top of the mountain Jesus was transfigured. His face shone. His clothing became dazzling white, whiter than white. And his three closest friends were terrified when they saw two figures with Jesus – Moses and Elijah. And – bless his heart – Peter, who always had to say something – said it was good for them to be there to make three dwelling places, three booths for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. We and the three disciples fell on our faces in awe. If only we could freeze this moment in time we thought. Peter is right; we should keep the three great prophets here forever. If we could just put them in a

box to preserve this moment. But just then a bright cloud came over the mountain top and God spoke saying that Jesus was his beloved Son and we were to listen to him. A nanosecond later we came out of the dazzling brightness of that moment and no one else was there but Jesus. It was so clear to Peter, James and John, and to all of us who witnessed these things that this was our friend and companion whose face shone like the sun, the Son. His glory was revealed. This man, this God-man, was really the Messiah, a man and yet more than a man. God's light shone through him. And we were supposed to not tell a soul til after he was glorified, after his glory was revealed after the three days he had been teaching us about that would come to pass.

How is that possible? After what we had witnessed on the mountaintop, how could we keep it to ourselves? You don't see your best friend, your teacher, your only and true love glorified like that.

Once in a great while we might see something akin to that. Sometime, every now and then we might be blessed to see something so touching, so alive that it transfigures the face of someone. It might be as Fred Buechner says watching a woman baking bread, of an unlikely person being moved by music at a symphonic concert, standing in the sand as the tide rolls in,³ or seeing Mariana Rivera pitch his last ballgame. Something we witness in our limited experiences that is so simple yet moving can almost be transfiguring if pay attention. It happened once to me the day that our son Matthew, presented his newborn son Dylan to us. Matt's face, and I am willing to bet, my face, shone. Jim caught it on camera. It was more incandescent in real life. If ever you something like that, remember Jesus and his mountaintop experience.

Sadly for Peter and the two Zebedee boys, they had to come down from the mountain. So do we, but we have seen Jesus in all his glory. Here in this place, Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the the light of the world - has come into our lives. This new church year began with an Advent of preparation, then the birthing of Christ, and now God's revelation of Jesus as God's Son, God's beloved. On Wednesday this week we will go into the season of Lent where we must listen to God's Son. After the brilliance of the transfiguration a cloud covers

us like a shadow, and a voice from out of the cloud speaks: “THIS IS MY SON, THE BELOVED; LISTEN TO HIM! In this next 40 days of Lent, it is my prayer that we listen to Jesus. We don’t have to give up something we love, like chocolate or that nightly sip of single malt Scotch whisky, or anything else that has become our tradition to leave alone during Lent. But I want to suggest we might buy a New Testament that we won’t mind writing in, and truly listen to Jesus’s words, really listen to him. Let the words of scripture guide us. Listen to HIS words. Make time to listen to him in the words of Scripture, yes, but in one another’s words too. Study your Bible. Share your study with one another. Find a Study Buddy and make one another accountable.⁴ See Jesus in one another’s faces, maybe even in just one revelatory glowing moment. Just listen to him.

Lord, may it be true. Amen.

¹ Mark 7:26-29.

² See Mark 7:34.

³ Frederick Buechner Sermon Illustrations on the Transfiguration. See <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#inbox/FMfcgzGxRdsZNxDXIHGhLRmBbQCZCdfg>

⁴ Perhaps Study Buddies might choose a book in the New Testament (and not Philemon which is only one chapter of 25 short verses) and study together. You could do this face to face or by email, or texting, or talking. Share what you have read and what you heard while listening to Jesus.