

Last Sunday after the Epiphany February 3

Readings: Exodus 24:12 – 18; Psalm 99; Philippians 3:7-14; Matthew 17:1-9

We all love a parade. At the very beginning of the Rose Bowl Parade, who do we see? Look at all those police on motorcycles. Note: we begin with the Law. Next comes the parade officials --- the men and women who designed the parade, the people with the vision. And then comes the parade with all its diversity and life. Here we see real people who have transformed the vision into a reality. The hopes and dreams of the whole year come alive in the parade.

Our Gospel tells about the parade. Moses represents the guidelines for abundant life in the community. Elijah is a visionary. He has a prophetic understanding of the presence of love, compassion and justice. Jesus is the transformation of the law and the prophets into the parade of the living presence of God.

Peter and the boys easily miss the point. Rather than becoming part of the living parade, they want to take pictures and sell t-shirts. They want to describe the parade rather than joining the parade.

All of us here have joined the parade. All of us have been transformed over and over again. We may remember a mountain top experience.

In 1970, I was part of a study group reading a book called Man the Manipulator by Everett Shastrum. The premise: we manipulate ourselves from the experience of authentic life. Some of our favorite truths build walls of bogus security.

We are churchgoers who have learned the laws. We share the prophetic vision of the Kingdom of God, peace on earth and good will among all people, and we have moved on. We have been transformed. We have become real, live creators of the Kingdom.

Sadly, there are many who are stuck on the mountain worshipping the law and the prophets.

Bishops, clergy and lay folks, old and young will all come to the cross road. We will be on the mountain top or in the desolate valley. We may experience the unexpected marvelous gift. When we find ourselves in this place, as we all will from time to time, in one hand, we will have a camera with one picture left to take, and in the other hand will be a quarter.

We will take the last picture and freeze frame ourselves or we will use the quarter to call for back up. We will call folks who will help us gently move on.

Aging is an awesome and relentless process of transformation. Young folks will tend to see the path of life becoming wider with more opportunity and choices. As we get older, we tend to see the path narrow. We begin to lose more and more.

Remember the man or woman who faced aging clearly. We have deep respect for them. They do not gloss over or deny difficulty. Rather, they see themselves very clearly. Virginia Barwick was not able to drive. She called CAT for special transportation. Now, Virginia was deaf as a post and she would not wear her hearing aids, her very expensive hearing aids, but so many times she accepted reality and used the quarter to call for help.

Many of us here are being slapped around by all that life has to offer. After the burial of Lue's brother, three folks who came from out of town were killed in automobile wrecks going home.

Late stage cancer recently discovered.
The loneliness of miscarriage.
Anniversaries of loss, separation and divorce.

Along with all this, we have weddings and birthdays, anniversaries and family reunions.

Through all of it, we are being held in the loving arms of God. We have used our quarters. We have reached out. All we really need is the presence of an angel with flesh on their bones. If words cannot express, then silence is the gift.

The man said he was ready for suicide. "I'm so tired," he said. As I listened, he did not have much hope. His only hope would be from an outside source. He's got the quarter.

Moses met God in the clouds.
Elijah met God in the clouds.
Jesus met God in the clouds.

You and I have met the living presence of God because they all did not stay in the clouds.

When we move out of the clouds, when we use the quarter, we will delve into that dangerous life where all desires are known and no secrets are hid.

When we come to Jesus just as I am, it shatters the stained glass image we try to project. We know the secret; from Psalm 51, the sacrifice to God is a trouble spirit, a broken and contrite heart. O God, you will not despise.

Soon we will open our hearts. We will come to the banquet, with our joys and sorrows and we will know the living presence of compassion and mercy is near!

Amen.

Rev. Will Hinson
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