

The Rev. Josh Stephens
St. John in the Wilderness
February 23, 2020

The Last Sunday after the Epiphany: Exodus 24.12-18, Matt 17.1-9

May it Last

Well then! It has been quite a journey, hasn't it? This is a really important Sunday, as I'm sure you are aware. Today marks the end of a movement of the Holy Spirit that began some time ago. I know what you're thinking and, no, I'm not talking about your search for a new rector or about our search for a new parish family. I'm just talking about Epiphany. This is the last Sunday after the Epiphany of our Lord. And that's important! Isn't that why we have trumpeters and special singers here? That must be why we have big parish breakfast, too! I know that's why all of you are here also!

Epiphany falls on January 6th of each year. As it arrives we find ourselves swimming in the joy of Christmas, a world overflowing with incarnation, and after twelve days of that abundance we must ask, like the Magi did, "Who is this Christ?" and "What does he mean for us and for our world?" We say a prayer on Epiphany, saying, God won't you "Lead us, who know you now by faith, to your presence, where we may see your glory face to face." That prayer remains with us today: lead us to your presence, O God, reveal your goodness and your glory to us.

Today we arrive at the Mountain. We know God has shown up on mountain tops before, appearing to Moses in a bush that burned but was not consumed, appearing to Elijah in the stillness that followed wind, earthquake, and flame. In our reading today, we hear of God showing up in smokey mountains. Moses entered the cloud, it says, something you have undoubtedly experienced on your hikes at elevation or your meandering drives through the mountains that surround us. Maybe you were looking for God, also. Moses entered that cloud and he stayed there in God's presence for as long as he could.

Our Gospel reading tells of a time when God heard that prayer of ours -- we are not the first to pray it. The questions posed by our Gospel readings back when Epiphany began -- when Magi searched, when Jesus was baptized by John, when his first miracle happened at a wedding in Cana of Galilee -- those questions are answered today on another mountain with Jesus transfigured before Peter and James and John. His face shone like the sun, his clothes dazzling white. And looking at him they saw God's glory face to face. Sometimes prayers do get answered, especially when we begin to yearn for ourselves what God has always been longing for us.

There is one part of this transfiguration reading that I must admit I have never understood: What in the world is Peter going on about? Peter says, seemingly in his over-excitement, "Lord, it is good for us to be here! Let us build three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!" Preachers usually poke fun at Peter and say, "Here goes Peter once again with his foot in his mouth, fumbling for words like he has no idea what he's talking about!"

And yet when we read the Bible as a Church, when I hear Scriptures on occasions like this when Christ's body is so gathered, I find they have new meaning. It's as if we interpret the Scriptures through our lives together. I think we find ourselves, as a community, in Peter's shoes on this Last Sunday after the Epiphany. These weeks leading up to now have been quite a journey since we started wondering who this Christ is and what his life could mean for us as The Episcopal Church of St. John in the Wilderness.

I have no doubt that God has been with us, not just in Epiphany, but during all of these months of transition. I have no doubt that God has been with you throughout this entire journey of listening, discernment, and calling, and that through all of this you have had an experience of God's presence. I know that I have through you all. Perhaps God has heard our prayers, too. Like Peter, it's ok to fumble for words today. It's worth trying to express the sentiment of our hearts as we say, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. Let's make this last." I think that's what Peter meant: let's enjoy these moments; let's make this last. We could do a lot worse than Peter did as we yearn to encounter God face to face. I believe we have encountered God in this journey through the love you have shared with each other and with me and my

family. We yearn for me more of it as we say, “Lord, it is so good for us to be here. Let’s enjoy these moments. Let’s make this time in God’s presence last.”