

So here we are on this last Sunday of Epiphany with the readings that are, in our tradition at least, traditional. Each year on this Sunday we hear of Jesus going up the mountain and being transfigured in the presence of his disciples Peter, James and John and his standing in the presence of and conversing with Moses and Elijah -- who represent the very old story of which Jesus is a part -- the law and the prophets. Each year on this Sunday, we hear God's voice echoing the words of Jesus's baptism -- this is my beloved Son with an added imperative -- listen to him. On this last Sunday of Epiphany we always hear about this event in the life of Jesus that is called the transfiguration. The event itself has its own feast day on August 6 and is one of a handful of feasts that commemorate events in Jesus' life. Along with Jesus' baptism it is one of two events in his life that the church commemorates that isn't either from his infancy or from the last week of his life.

Which is to say it is a pivotal event. Pivotal in the life of Jesus, pivotal in our understanding of Jesus and his mission, and placed as it is in our liturgical season, pivotal in our lives as well. During this season of Epiphany we have watched the light of Christ grow brighter and brighter. First a star and an infant, then a man with a mission anointed with the Holy Spirit and, followed by crowds seeking healing and hope and now to this point where his light shines ever so brightly, so brightly that his disciples cannot miss the fact that he is not merely a man, not merely a teacher and healer, but the son of God. This mountain top event comes shortly after Jesus has told his disciples of his fate in Jerusalem and of his resurrection. It follows, too, his instructing the disciples on the need to take up their cross and to lose their lives for his sake. From this time on, the story moves swiftly as all that he has foretold comes to fruition. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to suffer and die -- Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to give his life that we might be rise with him. Alleluia!

It is a rich tableau here on the mountain. Knowing themselves in the presence of something special, the disciples are drawn to commemorate and worship. But the voice of God literally has them on their knees in awe and fear.

This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.

Jesus who stands with the law and the prophets is to be their authority. Jesus, God's Son, is the one to whom they should listen and obey.

If we had been alive at that time, we would have heard all sorts of echoes of the world around us and felt, perhaps, some dissonance. Most Roman emperors were described as sons of God. Most Roman Emperors claimed divinity, some by

adoption other by birth. Jesus stands in stark contrast to them upending the status quo. If Jesus is God's son, God must be choosing a humbler way. God the creator and ruler of the universe chooses meekness--not imperial power--and suffering, sacrifice and love over the force of arms and violence, fear and intimidation. The glory of God is revealed on the mountain in a man of lowly birth, who lives in the service of others and will die to redeem the world.

This is my beloved son. Listen to him!

I find it interesting that the last thing Jesus has said to the disciples is an invitation to take up their cross and follow, to find life in losing it. And the first thing he says to them after the event is "Get up. Do not be afraid." The word here translated as "get up" is the same word used to describe Jesus rising from the tomb. It's as if having seen the glory of God on the mountain, they are invited to live into that new life right then and there, and as if they are being reassured of the rightness of the mystery of the kingdom of God where strength is found in vulnerability and life is gained in the giving -- not the taking.

The powers of kings and emperors, the authority of the rulers in this world so often rest on fear and force. These are the powers that shout of the need to be the best, the first, to have the most, amass the most. The rulers of the world insist that life is about me and mine, us and ours. The winner takes all and the loser goes home in humiliation. But God has another plan and another way, and that way is show in Jesus. It is a way of humility and love, a way of service and giving, a way of sacrifice for the last and least, and a way that constantly invites us to step out of our comfort zone and join with "them" in creating the kingdom of God.

On this the last Sunday of Epiphany we celebrate that way, and seeing the Glory of God in the path that Jesus follows we are invited to listen, to be brave and to follow where he leads. This is the movement from Epiphany to Lent, from the experience of the love of God in Christ to learning to give ourselves for the world. This it seems is the appropriate way to worship the Lord of the universe: not in a booth or on a mountain, not even on our knees in a church but in service and in love.

It is a scary and demanding task -- this living the life of Jesus. Listening to and obeying his call to humility and love and it is why each year we pause at this point to hear again Jesus's invitation to rise with him and not to fear. This is call to life in its fullness.

Today we will Baptize Graham Miller. Graham will join with us in rising to a new life in Jesus and following in his way as have his parents and his grandparents. Today, he with us will know God in the love of his Son and will rise to new life. Alleluia.