

Second Sunday of Lent

March 8, 2020

Genesis 12:1-4a
Psalm 33
2 Timothy 1:8b-10
Matthew 17:1-9

At the heart of every culture there is an attraction to the spiritual world, a fascination with what remains secret at the heart of reality. We can see this in the most cherished artifacts of a culture, some sort of intimation there is something more than can be seen or heard or touched. A great painting, for example, has many more layers of meaning than a simple photograph. A great piece of music causes wonderful reverberations in the depths of our being. The artist has the gift to inject the spiritual into the fabric of the material matter or sound. Human integrity demands that, even while pursuing our mundane lives, we maintain contact with this hidden source of energy and wisdom.

So often the veterans I come to know in treatment have lost the connection to the deep spirituality that lies within them. Or they might well know it is there and they are afraid or do not know how they might engage that very mysterious part of themselves. So often this presence goes unregarded for all of us, but from time to time, we become conscious of a feeling that there is more to life than what we take in with a casual gaze. We become aware of a mysterious yearning that surpasses the desires we have for things that we hope to acquire. My hope whether working with the veterans, or here in the parish, is that each one of us might awaken to the depth of goodness that has been placed within us. That we might never grow weary or despondent but open and ready for the mystery of that goodness. This goodness is very much a part of our own selves but also a part of the divine.

Throughout the scriptures there are innumerable moments of transcendence, where the human and the divine come together. The call of Abraham in the opening lesson is a moment where he feels and knows the presence of God. That presence is convincing enough that in his old age, Abraham takes leave of the three things that define a person in the ancient world, his county, kindred, and home. Following God's directive, he goes to a new land trusting that God will bless him and make him a blessing to others. Paul also had a moment of transcendence where he experienced the presence of Christ Jesus on the road. Rather than continue to persecute the early church, Paul became the foremost apostle and preacher in the early church. From prison in our second lesson, Paul encourages the young disciple Timothy to "bear his share of hardship for the gospel." Christ was so overwhelmingly present in Paul's life that he saw no hardship that could not be endured.

What we have in the gospel lesson is an extraordinary moment of transcendence. Jesus invited Peter, James, and John to ascend the mountain with him. They had been with him for some time, they heard his preaching, they knew he could truly help people. They remained with him because they knew he was fulfilling their hopes for something better. Jesus brings them into a moment of transcendence, a glimpse into who he is and what is evolving in their midst. Peter, James and John knew they were in the presence of the most important figures of the scriptures, Moses and Elijah. Jesus became phenomenally present and he was in conversation with these two important figures. Once the cloud comes down and around them, the human and the divine come together. The voice commands them *to listen* to God's beloved Son!

As quickly as it happened, it is now over. It is sorta back to normal but their lives would not be normal. This is how a transcendent moment works, we go back to the normal but the normal is not quite the same. Perhaps more than anything, this moment up on the mountain was to give these apostles the ability to understand the suffering, death, and resurrection Jesus had been speaking about. An experience of spiritual transcendence gives an individual confidence that God is near and that God has a plan, even though it might be unclear or mysterious. What God

asked of these apostles and what God asks of us is that *we listen to his Son*. Listening to Jesus is being open to a relationship, nurturing a relationship that can give meaning and strength in challenging moments.

I am working with a veteran who is pretty overwhelmed with stress, anxiety, and as you can imagine, his behavior is often out of control. He speaks of two little girls who were killed, one died in his arms. He is committed to doing all that he can to save children from harm. He has been so intense in his efforts that his wife tells him he is feeding his trauma symptoms, rather than recovering. He had mentioned that he believes in God and he says he often prays. I asked him if “God ever speaks” and he responded yes. And then I asked “do you listen to God?” The key for each of us is to listen to what Jesus has to say.

We have pondered God’s sacred word and we will celebrate Eucharist and come forward to receive Christ. Perhaps in this second week of Lent, as we pray we can use fewer words and try to listen to his voice. My our hearts be ready for his wisdom.