

The Last Sunday after Epiphany
Year A - 23/2/2020

Exodus 24:12-18

Psalm 2

2 Peter 1:16-21

Matthew 17:1-9

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

On the mountain, a privileged witness to the Transfiguration, Peter can't help himself... 'Lord this is wonderful! Let's get busy and build three shelters for you and your heavenly companions.' All he really needs to do is stand there, bathing in the glorious light, silent in awe and wonder, open to the divine presence... allowing Christ's light to heal and transform him. But he can't bear it - he has to get busy and do something... thus breaking the moment and banishing the vision.

Peter the activist is typical of the 21st century church we belong to - unable to stand still... always needing to do something... venerating busyness above all else. Whereas, tradition says, the heart of the church's call is actually contemplative - at the heart our life is the stillness of worship and prayer. It is this attentive opening to God's presence that transforms us and makes us new.

Even when it comes to works of justice and evangelism, the central action of the church is to invite people to come and stand with us in the light of Christ. Our unique gift is to remind a distracted and anxious society what it means to relax in the stillness of God... trusting that all will be well in the Creator's love.

The Franciscan teacher Richard Rohr says, "When religion does not move people to the mystical... it is more part of the problem than any solution. At this level it is largely incapable of its supreme task of healing, reconciling, forgiving and peace-making. When religion does not give people an inner life or a real prayer life, it is missing its primary vocation."

It's a real challenge for us, isn't it? I mean, we have just gone through the process of forming our Mission Action Plan - it will be presented to the Annual Vestry Meeting next month and the parish asked to adopt it. And, as the name suggests, it's about action!! Things we want to *do*, to *achieve*. But actually, today reminds us that this is not our core calling - that we should be more concerned about the ways in which we allow people to be still and know God.

And we do a pretty good job of this (sometimes). Our Eucharistic worship, for example, is the place we are most likely to give ourselves to attentive stillness, and to experience Christ's light washing over us. Our small fellowship groups study God's word and give participants an opportunity to share fellowship and community.

And I see it in other places, too. Our community life - the simple ordinary relating and care, whether it be over a coffee or our prayer chain, or in the caring for people in home or hospital or Nursing Home... opportunities where we can shine Christ's light on each other in friendship, support and love.

And all the contributions that make worship and community possible - the leadership, the rosters, the administration, the communication, the property care. Even these can, in their own way, contribute to the gift we are called to offer as church. I place a high value on this stable and steady heart-beat of our parish church - and therefore much of my time and energy as parish priest. goes to caring for, attending to, encouraging and supporting this life.

Back to our gospel... While Peter was babbling on like this, a light-radiant cloud enveloped them. As they found themselves buried in the cloud, they became deeply aware of God. Then there was a voice out of the cloud: "This is my Son, the Chosen! Listen to him."

“Listen to him!” What do we hear Christ saying to us? Where is he calling us? It’s the critical question for every church to ask. I’ve learned over my relatively short number of years as a priest, that despite the amazing respect and authority you give me, I can only answer this question for myself.

That is to say, what I hear does not determine what you will hear - that’s your business, your work - and what we decide collectively about our vocation as a church, will be the fruit of our corporate faithfulness.

But it is right at this time as we continue to plan for our future, as the Parish Council discerns our Mission and outreach directions, and as we approach our Annual Vestry Meeting that we try and hear more clearly what Christ’s voice is saying.

I, like many other people in this parish, do practice attentive and daily listening to the voice of God speaking from the cloud of prayer... and for me - this is what I hear...

As church we are being called to a renewal so radical, that only Christ’s metaphor of death and resurrection can describe it. The future of our ‘brand’ of Christianity is contemplative - that is, we exist to explore the depth and mystery of God... and to share this with the world around us. Our churches are to be sacred spaces of light... our worship is to be deeply prayerful, mystical and beautiful. Our communities are to be calm and loving - safe havens of rest for all who seek shelter under ‘God’s wings’.

And critically important in this renewal, is that we rediscover faith as a WAY... not an institution in which we take-out membership and fulfil obligations of attendance, not a list of doctrinal propositions to believe-in... but a path of practice and lifestyle that we walk... As people who have experienced the shining light of Christ... who have heard the voice of God speaking from the cloud... we listen to the voice of Christ, and we follow.

Today's gospel reminds us of our true vocation... of what truly matters...

- to stand worshipfully... still and attentive... bathing in the light of Christ;
- to share this light with others... in love, peace and justice
- to listen to Christ's voice and follow in his path.

Please pray for the gift of the Spirit in discernment - your own personal direction and vocation, and for this parish as a whole as we continue the process of discerning how it is God wants us to be in this place at this time. For it is only in listening for God - not in the busyness displayed by Peter in today's Gospel - but only in the silence that we will truly understand our vocation, as people who stand in Christ's glorious, all-encompassing light of love.

In the name of God. Amen.