

March 3, 2019  
Last Epiphany  
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### **Being Light in our World**

The date of Easter tells us how long the Epiphany season will be. There is a complicated chart on page 880 in the Book of Prayer that will show how April 21 this year is Easter Day. Easter is fairly late this year, making the Epiphany season long. By the time we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord, the grass may be green again and the flowers blooming.

Every Sunday since early January we have been sent out into the world with this Epiphany blessing: May Christ, the Son of God, be manifest in you that your lives may be a light to the world. May Christ be “epiphanied” – made known -- in you. It is my favorite seasonal blessing.

It always helps that in the northern half of the world Epiphany comes during the time of the year with the longest nights and shortest days. We are being sent out as light into darkened days – literally and spiritually.

Each year at the close of Epiphany and right before the beginning of Lent, we hear the story of the Transfiguration. Mountains are code in the Bible for proximity and closeness to God. The higher up you go the closer you are to the Holy. Big things happen on mountains. So, up Jesus goes with two of his closest friends and disciples to pray and then something happens. His face is changed and his clothes become dazzling white. Moses and Elijah show up – two key figures in the Hebrew Scriptures – representing the Law and the Prophets. And then, even more amazing and confounding, they started talking to Jesus. About his departure from the earth, which would happen, Luke tells us, in Jerusalem. On the cross.

Moses and Elijah appeared in glory. And then Peter and the others saw Jesus glory.

We often here this word glory when someone is surrounded by the things she loves. That Suzie, she is in her glory. Grandchildren, good food, everyone getting along and not fighting – everyone healthy -- her dog at her feet, the weather just right. We are in our glory – filled to the brim with everything good so much so that the bad of pushed off and away for a time. Love wins.

As its heart, this story shows us how closeness and communion with the holy, with God, changes us. We might not glow in the same way as Moses, Elijah and Jesus, but we know -- we just know -- when we come into the presence of truly blessed and faithful people that they shine and radiate in a way that speaks more than words.

In the Exodus passage we see how Moses, with the Ten Commandments in hand, comes down from Mt. Sinai, with his face shining because he had been talking to God. He had to

cover his face to talk to the crowd because they were so frightened by what they saw. Moses would be the only person in our faith tradition with such close access to God.

When I began to take my faith seriously, half way through my college years, I found myself attracted to the account of the Transfiguration. It was a time when I was a sponge – soaking in all I could learn and experience. Having felt a call to be ordained, I felt I needed to learn everything all at once. I would go on retreat. Listen to Christian music. I took every religion class my public university had to offer. I went on a *Cursillo* weekend, which was quite popular in Florida at the time in the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Churches, distilling the faith into a series of talks by leaders. I can still remember one early morning when the leaders woke us up before sun rise to go outside our cabins and what we saw were fifty or so people holding candles and singing – they had driven in the middle of the night from all parts of northern Florida. They were light.

Those early faith experiences for me would forever be hard to recreate. They came and went. They had their season, and I'm OK with that. I don't listen to contemporary Christian music that often. I haven't been involved in *Cursillo* for 30 years. But they served for me the intended purpose at key moment. They pointed me to a community of people who were feeling what I was feeling at the time. They were seeking what I was seeking. Meaning. Belonging. Wholeness. As I was searching for answers and direction, they showed me that what was going on inside of my heart and mind belonged to a long tradition filled with a vast community. I was not alone wondering if what I was beginning to believe was true or real. I saw others, aglow in their faith.

Those Rocky Mountain faith highs are important in our lives. Find them and name them. A piece of glorious music. The stillness of the morning. The peace of watching the sun come up over the ocean or seeing the look on your child's face as they take their first steps. A sense of wonder in simple things. The sense that comes over you when you experience the gift of forgiveness – allowing the burden of past mistakes and shame be lifted from your shoulders. We need these moments. We live for these times. And, we learn, we can't stay there forever. Life, the world, is waiting.

And, I learned, that mountain top experiences end at some point. You and I can always relate to Peter in this gospel story. Peter is always relatable. Who wouldn't want to hang out at the top in a protection cocoon of holiness? Let's make three dwellings and stay right here.

The gospel story continues on the next day when they had come down from the mountain they were met by a crowd of people shouting at Jesus to heal a young boy who was possessed by an evil spirit. The suffering of the world is always with us and never far if we are alive and aware.

Jesus said: "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.

16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

It is right and every normal to ask: how can we be this light? What difference can we make? To a changing climate, to unrest a world away, to hunger and abuse and neglect.

Next week between the two services we are going to hear from one of our own, Robin Sirois, share what she learned on a recent medical mission trip to Vietnam. She brings those sufferings and healings to us. You may we remember that we sent her out with our prayers.

I think of the people who carry the altar flowers to those who cannot get out to come to church. A simple act. To those grieving a recent loss. I cannot tell you how often I hear from who thank the church for sending these folks out. The flowers are nice, but the gesture and the thought is everything.

There are so many things that we all do when we leave this space that makes us bearers of the face of God into the world. Maybe we don't acknowledge, hold up the mirror or point the stoplight enough.

The story of the mountaintop experience is the last gospel we hear before we begin the yearly turn and begin the 40-day season of Lent in preparation for another Easter. We can remember the shine and the glory as we go out into the wilderness and do the hard, solitary work of listening to God in those quiet and disturbing places in our lives. I am not one who looks forward to Lent, yet I know its purpose and timing. To be salt for the world – to preserve the good things and enhance and improve the life around us – we would be wise to look inward for a time.

The words of Paul to the Corinthians pull together the pieces of today's message. He wrote: all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

God is about change and transformation. Be open to this movement in your lives. Take the time to leave room for this change. Cherish the mountaintop moments that inspires you for the days that are far less momentous. Allow yourself to reflect out what is being done in you. Let your light shine.