

The Transfiguration Sunday 2 Kings 2: 1-12; Mark 9: 2-0
 “And Jesus Took Them with Him”

“This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.” The voice echoes the words that Jesus heard, when he was just coming out of the water of his baptism by John the Baptist. Do you remember? Jesus saw the heavens torn apart and the voice came from heaven, saying to him, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

We read that passage from Mark on the “Baptism of the Lord Sunday,” which began this “Season after Epiphany.” On this Transfiguration Sunday, we hear the voice again from the cloud, talking not to Jesus this time, but to the disciples, and by extension to us, instructing us to listen to the Beloved Son of God.

The testimony that Jesus is God’s beloved son begins and concludes the season between Epiphany and Lent. Ash Wednesday is only three days away and we will move into the Season of Lent. Before we start our Lenten journey following Jesus on his way to Jerusalem onto the cross, today’s Scriptures remind us not only who Jesus is but also who we are and what we are called to do, in God’s ongoing work of salvation.

Have you ever heard of the “Thin Place”? In the tradition of Celtic spirituality, Thin Place is a place where the veil separating the earthly realm and the heavenly realm feels particularly thin, almost permeable; it’s a sacred, holy place. It’s a place of encounter with the Divine. There are many instances of Thin Places in the Bible, but in the biblical tradition, thin place is not so much a delicate veil but shows up more as burning pillars, the overshadowing clouds and whirlwinds.

Today’s Gospel passage begins “6 days later…” In the Hebrew tradition, 7 is the number for completion and fullness. In the Creation story, God worked for 6 days and on the 7th day God rested. So, we know something significant is about to happen. And it takes place on a high mountain, another example of Thin Places, and Jesus *intentionally led* Peter, James and John, the inner circle of his disciples, up the mountain, and Mark the Gospel writer is recounting this story for us, the generations of disciples who would follow them, so that we can be there, too. This Transfiguration story is for us.

There, Jesus’ clothes become dazzling white, which tells us God is present. How do we know? Remember how Moses’ face shone white after he’d been talking to God on top of the

mountain? That was when God called him to Mt. Horeb, a/k/a Mt. Sinai, to give him the Ten Commandment. At that time, God had actually assembled the whole people of Israel, but when Moses went to see God on top of the mountain, the rest of the Israelites were too afraid to go, so from that time onwards, God has sent prophets to bring God's words to them, Moses being the very first one.

But on this day, on the 7th day, **Jesus took them with him** to a high mountain. Jesus being with them, the disciples had nothing to fear, but when they saw Moses and Elijah speaking with transfigured Jesus, they still became terrified.

Peter, in near panic, channeled his fear into a suggestion to build dwelling places for them. But just as God told King David, who wanted to build a temple for God, that God had no need for an earthly dwelling place, Moses and Elijah have no need for any earthly dwelling place; they already live in their heavenly mansion.

The Jewish tradition believed Moses and Elijah to be alive in God's presence. Moses died but it was God who buried him, and no one knows where. Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, as we just heard. Now the disciples see Jesus in their company, and Jesus had just started telling them about his coming death, but at this point they did not understand what he had meant.

The presence of Moses and Elijah with Jesus reminds us that the death and resurrection of Jesus are the goal of the story of God's salvation in the Law and the Prophets. Moses had done his part in handing to them God's Law for the people, the gift of God for the people of God, and Elijah had done his part, passing on his mantel to Elisha, demonstrating the continued availability of people who would proclaim the word of the Lord.

And now, in the fullness of time Jesus came to embody the Spirit of the Law of Moses, proclaiming the message of the kingdom of God as the Prophet of all prophets, greater than John the Baptist, the last prophet in the manner of the biblical tradition, who had baptized him.

Jesus is there claiming his place among the prophets but also above them as the son of God, and **Jesus took the three disciples with him there**. Because, just as Elisha had to take on Elijah's mantel, the disciples would continue Jesus's ministry after Jesus is taken up to heaven. The God who delivered Moses and Elijah will certainly be with Jesus and his disciples, onto generations. We as Jesus's disciples are somehow part of this amazing company on the

mountain top. That is the invitation and encouragement in these words of the Scripture for us here.

The story of Elijah and Elisha we heard today assures us that as one prophet passes on, God immediately raises another, so the ministry in God's name will go on.

Elisha had been a devoted pupil of Elijah, determined to follow his master until the end. Elijah told him to stay behind three times and three times Elisha refused to leave him. When Elijah asked Elisha what he could do for him before he was taken away, Elisha asked for the double share of the prophet's spirit. Elisha wasn't asking for twice the portion of Elijah's prophetic power; "double share" was the portion of inheritance given to the first-born son or the legitimate successor in the ancient Israel. So, Elisha was actually asking Elijah to treat him like his first-born son. No wonder he called out "father, father," when Elijah was being taken up into heaven.

Elisha was ready to step up as Elijah's successor, but Elijah says Elisha's request to receive the double share of his spirit is a difficult one because what share of his spirit Elisha receives is not up to him but up to God, for it is God who raises a prophet. Elisha must rely solely on God to provide for him all that he needs to fulfill his call. Regardless, Elisha does not avert his eyes from the awesome vision of the chariot of fire and the horse of fire and watched his master taken up into heaven.

Having witnessed Elijah's departure from the life on earth, Elisha is heartbroken. A mantle that has fallen on him from the heaven in which Elijah disappeared, the same mantle Elijah threw on him as a symbol of his "call," is all Elisha is left with. Elisha must pick up the mantle and go on, vulnerable and totally dependent on God alone.

With Jesus, though, we have not been left behind all alone. Jesus, before taken away from his disciples, prepared them for the time after his departure from the earthly realm, by promising his presence in the breaking of the bread and in the sharing of the cup.

In fact, he offered himself, flesh and blood, to the disciples at that their last supper, and through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, he continues to offer himself to us, empowering us to continue his ministry. The Lord's table has become for us a thin place where we encounter our risen Lord, where we are as vulnerable and awestruck as Peter at the mountain top.

In what ways is our congregation vulnerable and dependent on God who nourishes us? In what ways are we experiencing vulnerability, difficulty, struggle, and challenge? Can we

name them not simply as obstacles to be overcome, but as opportunities to embrace our dependence on God's mercy? Hardships of life are the areas where God shows up in God's faithfulness.

As we live in the world of constant change, we see the constancy of the God of Moses and the God of Elijah and Elisha, the God we know most fully in the beloved Son. We belong to the household of this amazing and awesome God, and we are called to continue the work of the kingdom of God. It is our turn, now.

Jesus took his disciples with him to the high mountain, so we could hear the voice of God, his Father, and obey by listening to him. Jesus took his disciples with him to the high mountain, so that we could see Moses and Elijah, and know we follow them by following Christ. May we be empowered and nourished this day, in the Thin Place that is the Lord's table, as we prepare ourselves for the Lenten journey to follow Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.