

Introduction to the themes for the day and season

We find ourselves somewhere between a season of revelation—epiphany and a season of reflection and repentance—lent. In the “in between times” or what Celtic spirituality calls the thin places, we’re most apt to be surprised by the holy finding its way into our lives. Listening to the story of Jesus’ transfiguration, we might appreciate a description from the Rev. Dr. Martha Simmons, creator of the Women of Colour Project for preachers—she says transfiguration moments are where “the sweet by and by meets the nasty here and now”

Gospel :Mark 9:2-9

2Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 6He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” 8Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. 9As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Sermon

We witness three liminal moments in Jesus' life where the sweet by and by indeed meets the nasty here and now—his baptism, his transfiguration and his resurrection. The spectre and stink of death clings to the glorious moments and we struggle to come to terms with that—maybe in our heads kid ourselves that we can think “dialectically” as we quote theologians who tell us Mark identifies Jesus' glory in his serving and suffering. Yeah, but do we want to LIVE there? Can we?

Peter tries unsuccessfully to process and synthesize seeing Jesus in the company of Moses and Elijah. He might remember a motto that when Elijah arrives there will be no misery. So he believes THIS is the moment...this is it and he wants to build shelters to commemorate it.

From that day to this preacher have chided, rebuked, and corrected Simon Peter. Notice Jesus' response. Silence—he says nothing. The mystical moment is what it is—how are we supposed to process it, or recount it or reconstruct it?

Years ago, a Lakota elder talked to us about such experiences as being like a lightning flash that happens in the dark of night. For an instant we see everything...but our brains can't take it all in at once even though our eyes might and they even hold glimmers even after the lightning passes. There's no way to describe all we've seen in that instant.

Peter doesn't know what to say and Jesus doesn't give him the quick answer. He's silent. He waits for Peter and his companions to remember the divine voice telling them to listen to him. He walks with them from the site of revelation down to the lowlands where Jesus again announces the inevitability of his arrest and death. Jesus leads his followers to be among people who need healing.

With one foot in the season of epiphany and the other poised to step into Lent, we might take up Dr. Karoline Lewis' invitation to think about the transitions our congregations have had in our faith life...building, renovating, relocating....leaders arriving and moving on....congregations being caught unprepared for COVID and its aftermath.

What has God led us through and toward? What's next? Lent is a fitting season to respond rather than react...to speak sparingly, to let silence teach, and to listen to God's beloved—the one who teaches, heals, forgives, blesses and saves.