

Sermons at Christ Church

Be a Joyful Gift to Others.

Epiphany VI/Transfiguration Sunday
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How do you see yourself? St. Paul writes to the church in Corinth and reminds them that we have been made slaves for Christ's sake. Elisha saw himself as the successor of Elijah, and so he followed him, even after he pleaded with him not to. How do you see yourself?

The Old Testament recounts the journey of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah was a devoted servant of God who had made quite an impression on his mentee Elisha. From Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho to the Jordan and beyond, Elijah consistently asked Elisha to stay behind. Elijah was testing the resolve of Elisha. But Elisha's devotion to the ministry of Elijah was such that if he had to disobey Elijah in order to do the work he believes God is calling him to do, then thanks be to God.

The learner in Elisha persisted in following his teacher, and when Elijah finally asked him to make a request, Elisha requested not money nor power-but a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Elisha knew what it meant to lead the people of God. And to be a faithful shepherd, he would need a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

It is as if Elisha was making the point that like his teacher, if he is to be successful in his service to God, if he were to remain devoted to leading the people of God, he would need double of God's indwelling spirit. Elisha saw himself, not as one who was fit for the task but one who was available for God to use him for the task ahead. How do you see yourself?

Today's gospel shares a story about Jesus taking Peter, James and John up the mountain, where he is transfigured or transformed before their very eyes. Peter, James and John are in disbelief. They didn't see themselves worthy of that experience and so they want to capture that moment with three dwellings. How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself worthy of the price of the gospel?

How you see yourself determines whether you are ready for the transformation that comes from being at the mountain top-the place where Jesus takes us. How you see yourself determines whether you are ready to be transformed by what is possible. How you see yourself determines whether, like Elisha, you are ready to follow, even when you have been asked not to.

The mountain top-the place where Jesus takes us, is a unique place where you can see the world not as it is but how it can be-the immense possibilities that lie untapped. It is a place where you are considered worthy enough to see the glory of God. It is a place of great privilege, and the experience of transformation at the mountain top is designed to unveil, expose and open our eyes to see life other than what we're used to-that life doesn't have to be like a jungle. It is meant for us to see the City of God.

One of the early fathers of the Church, St. Augustine in his book the City of God reflects on two cities: The City of God and The City of Man. According to Augustine, the two cities symbolizes the two spiritual forces of faith and unbelief. The City of God is that city where people who have been moved by the gospel of Jesus Christ commit themselves to the truths about God as revealed by Jesus.

The City of Man (jungle) on the other hand is that city where the inhabitants of the city are consumed by the cares of the world. The tragedy is that for those who are perishing, as Paul would say, there is nothing like a mountain top experience, because to accept the reality of that experience, invites the desire to climb that mountain, and when you dare to climb, you don't come back down the same person.

In his last speech before his assassination, Dr. Martin Luther King invoked images of the City of God. He said that he's been on the mountain top, where you don't only have the clearest view but you are open to being transformed by the possibilities that are available. Dr. King in a prophetic way, shared that he could see the footprints of God's faithfulness. Footprints of God's deliverance. Footprints of God's freedom. Footprints of God's healing. Footprints of God's redeeming love. Footprints of God's transforming work. Footprints in a city where justice and the love for the other consumes every part of our reality.

Dr. King saw footprints of people who have been so transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ that they can risk their very lives for the sake of that gospel. In fact, they have become slaves to the gospel.

Dr. King could tell the difference between the City of God and the City of Man. And he knew that the city of Man was in no way representative of God's vision for the world. The City of Man was like living in the jungle where life was about the survival of the fittest. In that jungle, we celebrate our own demons and that of others.

There's a cliché, life is not fair. Yes, life isn't fair when you live in the jungle. There is no justice in the jungle nor is there any fairness or compassion in the jungle. There's little to no devotion to seeing oneself through the lens of the other in the jungle. It is a place for those who are perishing.

Listen to Paul, even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. For they see no value in the good news which frees them from themselves and points light to the dark places of our lives.

There's a story of three foreigners who lived in a place where they couldn't consume alcohol. It so happened that these three foreigners, a Chinese, Ghanaian and Nigerian were caught drinking. They were arrested and appeared before the magistrate. They were all sentenced to 50 lashes. But before being whipped, they were presented with a wish.

The Chinese asked for a pillow to protect his back from the whippings. The pillow was totally torn into shreds. The Ghanaian also asked for two pillows. They too were torn into shreds. When it got to the turn of the Nigerian the magistrate said that since he knew his wife, he would be lenient with him and so asked him for two wishes. His first wish was that he wanted 100 lashes. And his second wish was that he wanted the Ghanaian tied to his back. How do you see yourself?

On the mountain top where Peter, James and John saw Moses and Elijah with Jesus, we see the two pillars of our faith, Moses and Elijah converge in Jesus-the Messiah. The one who brought the good news of God's salvation to us, the one through whom we see the glory of God.

Indeed, we may not be able to deal with the full force of God's glory, not because we live in a jungle, but because the gods of the world have blinded our minds to the extent that we find it difficult to believe that we are worthy, worthy to the point where God through His son Jesus Christ would save us.

This is the good news of the gospel which Paul revealed to the people of Corinth. That they are worthy of the blood of the lamb that was slain, you also are worthy of that blood.

Don't you ever think that the message of the good news is about a God who is being presented to you as wealth and power. The glory of the good news is one where we proclaim Jesus as Lord and ourselves as slaves for his sake. And the power of the slave lies in the proclamation of a gospel which redeems, restores, reconciles, rehabilitate and renews.

Those who are slaves to the gospel for the sake of Christ Jesus, dare to climb to the mountain top, and because of that, they have a unique view of what life in Christ should be, what the world should be and they refuse to condone the practices of the City of Man. Their sole desire as slaves of the good news is to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love. Because it is that same story that freed them.

How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as one who lives in the jungle because you been blinded by the cares of the world or one who considers himself or herself as slave of the good news of Jesus Christ?

I am convinced of one thing; the purpose of God's revelation to us is for us to know our worth and our value to God. It is for us to know that if we see ourselves the way ought to see ourselves, we wouldn't have to live in the jungle.

It is for us to behold the glory of God in the city of God, to feel our own darkness transformed by the radiance of God's light, to feel your life turned right-side up, to feel the dew drops of salvation on our face and on your tongue and to know that you are worthy of being saved.

Believe me, you don't belong in the jungle, you belong to the mountain top-a place where you make yourself available to be transformed, a place where you embrace your worth before God.

You belong to the mountain top because that is the one place where you can see the world as it should be. You belong to the mountain top-that's where you see the footprints of God's unyielding possibilities. Come with me to the mountain top, that's where you can see your real self.

Amen.