

Last Sunday after the Epiphany
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
11 February 2024
Mark 9:2-9

Today is the end of the season of appearance, revelation, discovery, and manifestation of God through his Son, Jesus. This season begins with strange foreigners who followed a star from distant territories. When the star stopped, they came face to face with Mary and her son and they were overwhelmed with Joy. On that day, those foreigners became full participants in Israel's dream of a Messiah. The promises made to the prophets for many centuries were revealed to them as they come face to face with a child who was destined to change the world. They worshipped and paid homage to that baby because in him they discovered God himself. Not on a lofty mountain, but in the ordinariness of a humble family lodging in a stable. From these men we learn determination, courage, and the ability to find God in the common and ordinary.

From revelation to foreigners, we move to a revelation to John the Baptist. John received visions from God pointing him to the Messiah ("The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and stay, he is the one...") He then announced to all, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me... I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." His simple baptism with water pointed beyond itself to a more powerful baptism about to come: The Baptism in the Spirit by the Messiah himself. Then God confirmed that vision with those amazing words, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Jesus is the one who baptizes with God's Holy Spirit. Behind his simple appearance and his commonness, he holds God's power of transformation and life.

Then, we see the revelation to some simple fishermen in Galilee. Philip tells his brother, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." We then hear Nathanael call Jesus "The Son of God, the King of Israel." This Messiah who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, is also destined to reign as King of Israel," as the prophets announced. We see the veil pulled a bit further as we learn more about this Jesus. He was expected by the prophets. He is God's answer to Israel's pain and sense of isolation. He is God's solution to Israel's sin.

The revelation continues and the Messiah, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and who was the king announced by Moses and the prophets, gathers a group of followers to whom he delegates the mission of announcing the good news of God. He promises them the ability to fish for people. He gathers a Church around

himself to reach the ends of the world with the Good News. God has chosen to dwell among humans and through his Son the awaited salvation of God had come into our world. God was in our midst; he had chosen to come to earth to save the earth from within. The Church then became the sign of God's mercy and love.

The following week, we saw the Messiah in a synagogue in Capernaum, and the veil was moved a few more inches. We learned a new reality about Messiah, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, who is the king announced by Moses and the prophets, and who gathers a Church for his mission. He has power and authority over all human and demonic forces that seek to thwart God's plans for the world. And through Christ, the Son of God, the Church is given the same power and authority to conquer all physical and demonic forces that stand in the way of God. Our Messiah is powerful and in him the Church is powerful. Our authority comes from him. If we believe in him, there is no power that can stand in our way.

Last week the veil was pulled a bit more and we learned what the Messiah's actual mission is. After healing many who were afflicted by physical and spiritual afflictions, Jesus says, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do." The Messiah, who baptizes in the Holy Spirit, who is the king announced by Moses and the prophets, who gathers a Church for his mission, and who has power and authority over all human and demonic forces, came to earth to proclaim a message of salvation. And he proclaimed this message by the way he lived, the words he used, the signs he performed, the way he died, and by his powerful resurrection. And what is this message? None other than this: God loves his people so much that he has chosen to come in human form in the person of his Son, to dwell among us, and to pay the ultimate price for our salvation on the cross. He will become the Kinsman Redeemer who frees us from our oppression. God has heard our cries.

Today, the veil is moved further. The age of the prophets represented by Moses and Elijah joins the age of the Church represented by Peter and James and John. Mount Horeb, where the law was first given to Moses, joins the high mountain where Jesus is transfigured. The brilliant light that engulfed Moses at Mount Horeb and Elijah at his ascension now covers Jesus as his clothes become dazzling white. The voices of Elijah and Moses talking to Jesus are joined by Peter's voice who represents the Church. Peter declares the great joy that fills the human heart when we come face to face with the living Christ. If only we could remove ourselves from the messy world in which we live and commune with God in a mountaintop experience for the rest of our days! Today, the voice of God to his son at Baptism, "You are my beloved in whom I am well pleased" is joined by God's voice to the Church, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

As Epiphany ends, we are left with a profound revelation about God in his Son: The child of the manger is the Messiah who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. He was announced as king by the Jewish scriptures and is Lord of Israel. He gathered for himself a Church for his mission, and the Church received this power and authority. He came to earth to proclaim a message of salvation, and he joins together the old and the new, the age of Israel and the age of the Church. And today, we are left with that wonderful imperative, “Listen to him!”

Our own history as a Church has been a revelation as well. We have found God in the unusual places of life. God has manifested his Son for us in our corporate life for 55 years. There was our founders didn’t know. They took risks and God blessed their efforts. They gathered together to pray, to dream, to imagine, and to celebrate the God who loved them and cared for them. And their sacrifice brought about much fruit. But it wasn’t only them. Every generation of this church after them has had to sacrifice a great deal. They prayed and dreamed of buildings and they worked exceedingly hard to make them a reality. They imagined how they might engage young families in the life of the church and those dreams bore fruit in the building of the BEC. They dedicated their efforts and resources to the building of our pastoral care ministries and even today we are reaping the benefits of those dreams as we celebrate the ministry of five new Stephen Ministers. Over the years, they discovered a faithful God who blessed their dreams and aspirations for Saint Dunstan’s. We are the realization of their dreams.

What is God revealing to us about his Son and his mission for our Church? Where do we see God today? What are our own dreams and aspirations? What are we willing to do to bring those aspirations to existence. What type of church are we hoping to be ten, twenty, thirty years from now? How are we proclaiming the Gospel of Salvation through our corporate life and the decisions we are making today? What is stopping us from realizing our dreams? Is it fear? Is it lack of faith? We know today what our founders knew back in the day. The same God who blessed their efforts then will bless our efforts today. We must act with courage. God’s revelation is as powerful today as it has always been. He is with us and he has power over all forces that stand on his way. God is calling us to do hard things, but these hard things have already been blessed by him. We must continue to dream, to build, to expand our reach. There is a message to be proclaimed and we can’t give up now. We are just starting and those who will come to this church in the future depend on our faithfulness and courage today.

Let us do the hard things God is calling us to do, not because we have all the answers and resources, but because we know that God will bless our faithfulness. Amen!