

Order of Service for February 14, 2021 - Feast of the Transfiguration

GATHERING

Gathering Song - 314, Arise, Your Light Has Come

Arise, your light has come! The Spirit's call obey;
show forth the glory of your God which shines on you today.

Arise, your light has come! Fling wide the prison door;
proclaim the captive's liberty, good tidings to the poor.

Arise, your light has come! All you in sorrow born,
bind up the broken hearted ones and comfort those who mourn.

Arise, your light has come! The mountains burst in song!
Rise up like eagles on the wing, God's pow'r will make us strong.

(Hymn lyrics printed under CCLI Licence # 11411292)

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, is with you all.

Litany

P - The light shines in the night of our lives.

C - The Epiphany of God has come.

P - The Magi said, "We have seen his star in the east."

C - The Epiphany of God has come.

P - A voice came from the heavens, "This is my son, the beloved."

C - The Epiphany of God has come.

P - Jesus said to Philip, "Follow me." Philip said to Nathaniel, "Come and see."

C - The Epiphany of God has come.

P - Jesus proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near."

C - The Epiphany of God has come.

P - The crowd was amazed, saying, "A new teaching — with authority."

C - The Epiphany of God has come.

P - Jesus said, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came to do."

C - The Epiphany of God has come.

P - The light shines in the night of our lives.

C - The Epiphany of God has come. Thanks be to God.

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray. The resplendent light of your truth shines from the mountain top into our hearts. Transform us by your transfigured Son, and brighten the world with your image, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

WORD

Gospel Acclamation

P - Alleluia. This is my Son, my chosen.

C - Listen to him. Alleluia

Gospel Reading

Mark 9:2-9

P - The holy gospel according to Mark

C - Glory to you, O Lord.

P - Six 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, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then 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." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As 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.

The gospel of the Lord.

C - Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon - From The Rev. Dr. Michael Pryse, Bishop of the Eastern Synod

Hi everybody! It is a real delight to be here with you today and to be a part of your Sunday worship and to give your pastor this small bit of relief. Our rostered ministers have been doing a magnificent job of providing opportunities for us to worship over the course of this long pandemic. But friends, it is very hard work and anything we can do to help lighten the load they are carrying is well worth supporting!

Today I'd like to share a few thoughts with you concerning the subject of vision. And I'm sure that most of you would agree that vision is a very important thing. You know very well from your own experience, both individually and as a congregation, that you need vision to carry a task through to completion. You need vision to sustain you and refresh you as you press through the bumps, turns and valleys we will inevitably encounter in life.

There is, however, a potential danger involved in this vision business. Vision is good, but the line between being visionary and being delusional can sometimes become very fine! Let me spell out the differences I see by way of an incident that happened to me some years ago on a golf course.

Now, for those of you who know not the pleasure of chasing a little bouncy ball over hundreds of acres of mixed terrain, let me tell you that all golfers carry a common vision. It is the vision of the perfect shot, a drive to the pin, a smooth effortless stroke and perfect backswing. You can imagine the gentle arc of the ball as it climbs into the sky. Perhaps a few astonished *oohs* and *aahs* from the gallery. And then lastly, you imagine the final, graceful drop of the ball, pin high and just a few feet from the cup.

Well, one day it actually happened for me. The vision became a reality. A perfect shot on a 265 yard par three followed by a gentle, dare I say casual, tap-in for birdie! It had never happened before nor since!

In retrospect, I now know that I should have accepted that vision, that unique experience, for what it truly was. I should have enjoyed this brief glimpse of golfing glory and then set it aside in my mind for future inspiration and guidance. But I didn't do that. Instead I immediately adopted the delusional posture of a naïve visionary.

I was no longer Michael, the intimate friend of sand trap and water hazard. I now stood among the great ones; a veritable Tiger Woods! And, of course, I encountered the end which ultimately comes to all naïve visionaries; and by the time I had finished the fourth hole I had lost

seven balls; torn up enough divots to generously sod my front lawn and was seriously contemplating how much my clubs would fetch at our next neighbourhood garage sale!

My vision was left in tatters. Not because there was anything wrong with the vision itself, but rather because I had naïvely assumed to have claimed and contained that vision rather than allowing myself to be carried forward, guided and inspired by it.

Do you see the distinction? In our Gospel lesson we see elements of this dynamic played out in more sacred terms. Jesus and his disciples go up a mountain. Jesus moves on ahead and then, suddenly and unexpectedly, apparent magic starts to happen. Jesus form starts to change, he becomes like pure energy, pure light. Glorified beings seem to appear; Moses and Elijah. And then finally the whole episode is dramatically concluded by a mysterious voice from the heavens that proclaims this same Jesus to be God's own Son.

Can you imagine having such an experience? And who can really know how or what was happening! Regardless, it was extraordinary and the response of the disciple's is understandable. They are both terrified by and captivated by this vision and want to hold onto it. They want this glorious moment to go on forever. They want to set up tents and live right there on the mountain!

But as quickly as the vision had come, it was gone. In an instant the disciples went from being privileged witnesses of the glories of heaven, back to being tired fisherman huddled on the unfamiliar face of a mountainside! The vision had come, and in spite of the disciples' desire to contain it and hold onto it, it had just as quickly passed. They confused this temporary and transitory vision for that which was eternal. They had confused the means with the end!

This is a danger which we, as a church, also need to continually guard against. We too can become misdirected and confused about the means and the end in ways that can distract us from our primary mission. Let me give you a secular example of what I mean.

In 1960 a Harvard business professor named Theodore Levitt wrote a classic article that focussed on the dramatic decline of the railroad industry in early 20th century North America. The decline of the industry, Levitt concludes, didn't come about because people and freight no longer needed to be transported. The railroad declined, rather, because the railway managers came to believe that they were in the railroad business rather than the transportation business. They confused the means - tracks and engines - with the ends - the transportation of people and freight!

Can you see any analogies for the church? Do we not sometimes function as if we were in the church business instead of the blessing business; the "we exist for ourselves" business as opposed to the "God's mission to bless the world" business? Do we not sometimes fall into this same trap of confusing the means with the ends and making it all about us; acting as if the church – our buildings, institutions, practices and beliefs were an end in and of themselves, rather than being a means by which we can support and participate in the ultimate end of advancing God's mission to bless and save the world?

I believe that there are many people in our communities who are open to experiencing the kind of conversions that many people experienced through Jesus' life and ministry, many people who are coming to recognize the emptiness and hollowness of the false gospels of contemporary life. But those questioners and seekers won't look for a renewed life in a community in a church that doesn't provide evidence of having experienced a similar conversion; that doesn't believably express the new life that we claim to be calling others to embrace. They won't easily be drawn to the life of a church which appears to be more interested in the church business than in the blessing business.

One of the unexpected, albeit forced, blessings of this time of pandemic has been a reordering of priorities; a renewed appreciation of the means and the ends. During this time

where we have been cut off from our church buildings and from the activities and practices that received so much of our attention and care in a pre-pandemic time, we've been given the opportunity to focus on the real end and purpose of everything that we do; advancing the reign of God through faithful proclamation, prayer and service. It's been a kind of forced re-set that we really need to hang onto when the day eventually comes when we can return to some measure of normalcy in our life together.

The same voice that proclaimed Jesus to be "well loved" on the mount of transfiguration speaks that same blessing to us, today. That blessing is a means, and not an end. It is a means by which we are called to aid and abet the ultimate end of God's mission to bless and save the world; a means by which we are empowered to share the Gospel of love and reconciliation that has been entrusted to us; generously, freely and extravagantly for the world's salvation. Amen.

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

Hymn of the Day - 315, How Good Lord, to be Here

How good, Lord, to be here! Your glory fills the night;
your face and garments, like the sun, shine with unborrowed light.

How good, Lord, to be here, your beauty to behold
where Moses and Elijah stand, your messengers of old.

Before we taste of death, we see your kingdom come;
we long to hold the vision bright and make this hill our home.

How good, Lord, to be here! Yet we may not remain;
but since you bid us leave the mount, come with us to the plain.

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Prayers of the People

A - Walking in the dawning light of Christ, we offer our prayers for the world God loves, the church God calls, and for all people according to their needs.

[Short pause]

A - God who brings transformation, we admit that we have too frequently confused the means with the ends, the method with the goal. Remind us of what is important; remind us of what matters. God of light,

C - Shine in us and through us.

A - God who brings transformation, we are too often blind to our potential because of our fear of where you might take us. Clear our vision so we may see where we need to grow. God of light,

C - Shine in us and through us.

A - God who brings transformation, we confess our desire to hold back, to stay where it is safe, to cling to what is comfortable. Liberate us to explore new things, new ways, new possibilities, knowing that your care will go with us always. God of light,

C - Shine in us and through us.

A - God who brings transformation, motivate your church to leave the heights, go into the valleys, and learn what true service means. Free us to follow where you lead. God of light,

C - Shine in us and through us.

A - God who brings transformation, help us to walk with those who live in the valleys: the sick, the isolated, the poor, the hungry, the cold, and all those we name before you.

[*Long silence*]

Use us to shine your healing presence. God of light,

C - Shine in us and through us.

A - God who brings transformation, on the mountain, you revealed who Jesus really is. Re-create us in that image, that we may bear your love to all creation. God of light,

C - Shine in us and through us.

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C - Amen.

Lord's Prayer

P - And now we pray as Jesus taught us:

C - Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

SENDING

Benediction

P - God the creator strengthen you,

Jesus (†) the beloved fill you,

and the Holy Spirit the comforter keep you in peace.

C - Amen.

Sending Song - 318, Alleluia, Songs of Gladness

Alleluia, song of gladness, voice of joy that cannot die;
alleluia is the anthem ever dear by choirs on high;
in the house of God abiding thus they sing eternally.

Alleluia you are sounding, true Jerusalem and free;
alleluia, joyful mother, bring us to your jubilee;
here by Babylon's sad waters mourning exiles still are we.

Alleluia cannot always be our song while here below;
alleluia our transgressions make us for a while forgo;
for the solemn time is coming when our tears for sin shall flow.

In our hymns we pray with longing: Grant us, blessed Trinity,
at the last to keep glad Easter with the faithful saints on high;
there to you forever singing alleluia joyfully.

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Dismissal

P - Go in peace. Transformed to follow Jesus.

C - Thanks be to God!

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