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AMDG

Last Epiphany B, Transfiguration – February 11, 2018

Peter's instincts were good. He and his companions experienced something so incredible it stopped them short, and Peter wanted to hold onto it. But, Peter like us, didn't understand the inner workings of the Kingdom. This great Kingdom of God within is not a static condition or place to be achieved and held onto, but a Divine Dance of continual outpouring of love in and around and through us. Pouring out and receiving back again, pouring out and receiving back again.

Today is the Last Sunday after Epiphany, a season when we focus on the mystery of the Kingdom of God within, revealed in Christ Jesus. And this season closes with an event so amazing that, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all describe it more consistently than any other major event in Jesus' life, even more consistently than the Passion and Resurrection. This event was important. And, it was important, because the disciples didn't just experience it as a Transfiguration of Jesus. They experienced it as something so profound it rocked them to the core; they caught a brief look at a reality that was beyond their normal way of seeing - it was a glimpse of heaven and earth united in Christ, a glimpse into the Kingdom within. And, in this moment of resplendence, of utter clarity, they became keenly aware of just how small their lives had been.

Last week, I discussed how we experience the Divine in what James Finely describes as the concrete immediacy of life in the present moment, of God manifest in the here and now, and how when we experience those moments, we experience God, and the fragile intimacy of life lived in the moment. And, that is what Peter, James, and John experienced - God in the fragile intimacy of the present moment. And, that's why Peter wanted to stay put, to hold onto that fragile moment. In each version of this story it's Peter who says, "lets hang out here forever." You gotta love Peter, so honest, and so like us. But, what Peter didn't realize, and what we also fail to realize, is those moments of total clarity - we can't make them happen, and we can't hold onto them. In fact, in trying to pursue and possess those moments, we draw further

away from them, because, they are not things to be held onto. They are grace, they are gift; they can only be received and experienced, not bought or earned or merited. Peter wanted to stay in a transformative moment that was already passing, because all transformative moments are fragile already passing...and beginning to return anew. We have to let go of them, in order to receive them again. This is the pouring out and taking in that is the inner workings of God's Kingdom within. But, we're all about holding on, aren't we? Not letting go. We can't imagine anything that could be better than what we have or what we've already experienced, so we want to hold onto it, just as it evaporates like so much fog in the heat of a new day. It's amusing to see the waves of nostalgia that run on Facebook - idealizing some wonderful past, and wouldn't it be wonderful if we had that great past again. Of course the past that is remembered is the one without flaws, the edited version of the past - the delightful memory of riding without seatbelts or in the backs of pickups conveniently ignores the many tragic victims of car crashes and their loved ones who mourn them. "The good old days weren't always good, and tomorrow ain't as bad as it seems," says the great 20th century philosopher, Billy Joel.

Obsession with some past glory betrays a lack of faith. It reveals a lack of understanding of Christian Hope. Idealizing the past can be a form of idolatry where our own vision of the Kingdom is preferred above God's vision of the Kingdom. In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "thy Kingdom come, thy will be done," and I hope it's because we are saying that we want God's heavenly Kingdom and trust that what God has planned is infinitely greater than anything we could ever ask or imagine. We don't pray "my Kingdom come, my will be done." And, God's Kingdom is not in the past, with all its fleeting joys and it's flaws. God's Kingdom, and God's will is in our next act of love, our next act of mercy, our next act of forgiveness and welcome. To be open to God's heavenly kingdom is to let go of the one we think we have or had. And this can be so terrifying, especially when we are particularly attached to the world...our possessions, our preferences, our beliefs, our ideologies...our lives. What Jesus teaches us is that if we want to experience God's Kingdom, we have to let go our hold on the world.

And yet, it is in this world that we catch glimpses of the Kingdom. It is through our senses that we come to know the grandeur and glory of God, those moments of clarity when we do feel a unity with God and with God's creation – just like Peter, James, and John on the mountaintop with Jesus. And, as I taught last week, we have to be in the moment, in the concrete immediacy of life as it happens, in order to be present to God. While we can't make these moments of grace happen, we can assume the inner stance that offers the least resistance to be overtaken by the grace of those moments...which we cannot make happen. And, that inner stance is one of release, of letting go, whatever that might look like in our daily practice - contemplative prayer, art, writing, being in nature- whatever puts us in a state of receptiveness to God's grace. But, however wonderful the experiences are of being in the moment, of having glimpses of the Kingdom, we cannot be like Peter, wanting to camp out in that space. Trying to stay with those experiences is closing ourselves off to the possibilities that God has for us in the next moment. When our focus is holding onto anything - our memories, knowledge, experiences, wealth, possessions, opinions, principles, beliefs, - we're focusing on death. When we have the grace to let things just be, we're living into God's Kingdom.

And, as we endeavor to live life in the moment we also realize we have to go out in the world, we have to live, we have to interact with the very things we become attached to. But, something amazing begins to happen after we've practiced assuming the stance of least resistance, and having been overtaken by those occasional moments of brilliance - the world we felt we needed to push aside itself becomes more brilliant. We want to embrace it, we want to engage, we want to love, we want to serve, we want to heal, to forgive...but, here's the kicker...without attachment. As we learn to let go of our expectations, let go of outcomes, let go of our own wants, obsessions and prejudices we find we can engage in the world with a love that is free of wanting, a love that only wants to give, does not expect return. And, the more we engage in those acts of selfless love, we experience moments of grace and renewal. We realize we are engaged in the Divine Dance of pouring out and receiving, pouring out, and taking in again. We don't want to sit forever in transcendent magnificence, nor do we throw ourselves into the world

endlessly giving. We pour out and receive again, pour out and receive - this is the inner workings of the Kingdom, and as we engage in this Divine Dance, we find our lives transfigured, transformed as we reflect more and more the image and likeness of the Creator.

Yes, it is through letting go that we receive God's transformative love. We cannot transform our own lives, we cannot create our own transfigurations. If we could, we would want things to be more of the same. Our worldly possessions, our hobbies and interests, those would make us resplendent...but they do not, over time they often make us restless, irritable, and discontent. It's when we allow the Holy Spirit to transform us that we get glimpses of our true natures as God's beloved. Let us pray the prayer of St. Ignatius that we might be given over to this Divine Dance - Lord, I freely yield all my freedom to you.

Take my memory, my intellect, and my entire will.

You have given me anything I am or have;

I give it all back to you to stand under you will alone.

Your love and your grace are enough for me;

I shall ask for nothing more. Amen.