

February 11, 2018

Prayer:

Today, Transfiguration Sunday, is a transitional Sunday. It's the end of the Epiphany season in which we learn from people who have seen the light of God and have been drawn to follow the light of Jesus, people like the wise men, mother of Peter who was healed, and Jesus' disciples themselves. It is the beginning of the tough times faced by Jesus as he turned his face toward Jerusalem, knowing that crucifixion and death was ahead. The disciples had experienced light and joy and miracles with Jesus, now they faced the hard times of being a disciple and walking with Jesus to the cross. The time on the mountain was an in-between time, an interim period that would lead the disciples forward to continue the next part of the journey.

We all face "in-between" times, times of "not yet", times of looking forward to what can and will yet be. Teenagers look forward to the adults they will be; children look forward to the teens they will all too soon be. In our work we may realize that what was is lost, gone forever. Somehow we need to move on. We may see that somewhere along the line we've lost something in a relationship that we thought would always be there, and then we realize that if we don't want to lose it altogether we'll need to change our focus.

Most of these in-between times involve letting go of what was, whether we dearly loved it or not, and reaching out to what can be. We tend to want to hang on to what we know, even after we suffer a great loss.

As the disciples were going up into the mountain, they were entering a period when their life would change. While they were on the mountaintop,

they knew fear, astonishment, awe, excitement, disappointment, worship. A cloud overshadowed them and from the cloud came a voice saying, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Listen to him. This story is hard to comprehend. It is mysterious and like Christmas and Easter, it is a wonder!

This is the task all disciples are given as they face the future. Are we listening? Here is some of what Jesus taught that Mark wrote in his gospel and would have us pay attention to. Are we listening? First of all “Follow me.” (vs 1:17, 2:14), “Pay attention to what you hear.” (4:13), “Do not be afraid, only believe.” (5:36, 6:50) “It is what comes out of a person that defiles.” (7:20) “Whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave to all.”(10:44) (*Working Preacher.org.2-11-18*)

Catherine Marshall was listening to God when she wrote her book *To Live Again* after Peter, her husband, the Senate chaplain, had died at the early age of 46. She wrote of her experience this way: “In those first weeks after Peter’s death, I too had asked why. I had asked it desperately, confusedly, almost every hour of every day. Why did this have to happen to me? Why did the one I love have to die so soon? How can you reconcile a God of love with all the tragedy in the world?

I had received no answers then. That had left me with the alternative either of trusting God blindly on the assumption that God would give me some answers in God’s own good time, or of letting go all faith in the love of God. I knew that the latter would have netted only total darkness, abysmal grief.”

She goes on to say, “Therefore, out of no answer I had reached for the only answer. I claimed that extraordinary promise that God has made to His children in the midst of tragedy, *All things work together for good to them*

that love God. (Romans 8:28) I asked Him to work His miracle of bringing ‘good’ out of Peter’s death....”

“Did this mean then, that it had been God’s will that my husband die at forty-six of a heart attack? I did not think so. With all my heart I believe that a loving Father wills health, happiness, love and joy for His children. But on this imperfect earth, we rarely achieve these goals. In fact, we stumble into hole after hole. Given our stubborn wills, our limited spirits, our refusal to listen to God or even the message of our consciences, we often make a mess of our lives. Our fondest dreams come crashing down in wild desolation.’

‘Then what?’ She goes on to say, ‘It is as if God says, ‘Never mind. I understand. Even as you sit in the midst of your wrecked playhouse, don’t despair. The mess can be cleaned up. Hand the grief, the failure, the disappointment, over to Me. I’m the only One who can take the broken things from life’s rubbish heap, and by a divine alchemy make them better than they were before. Try Me and see.’”

Up on the mountain, Peter understood this same sort of longing for the wonderful things that could be. Just before Jesus took Peter, James, and John up the mountain, Peter had given the incredible statement of faith “You are the Messiah.” after which Jesus taught them that he was going to be killed and was going to rise again in three days.

Peter most definitely did not want to believe that. Such a loss would be unimaginable. He had a dream of such wonderful things happening because he saw Jesus doing so much healing and teaching. So many lives were being changed and helped, and he was a part of it all.

Then Jesus took him and his close friends up the mountain and everything changed. Here were Elijah and Moses, and Jesus as he had never

seen him. This was more like it, like it should be. He saw Jesus in all his glory. The voice of God said the only thing that would enable them to get through this in-between time, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” And then the vision was taken away from them. And they were left with nothing.

Peter learned that listening to Jesus involved knowing the law (as represented by Moses) and the prophets (as represented by Elijah). The written word is the foundation to what we hear Jesus say to us. What Peter and Catherine Marshall learned is that it is Jesus, and listening to him, that can get you through the tough times, the in-between times.

What will sustain us in ordinary times, as we as individuals, or even as a congregation? We read the Psalms where others have sung their prayers to God. We become aware of God in the ordinary things that happen to us. We take time to listen to God in our life. Take time in conversation with Jesus. Knowing that Jesus can work together all these things for our good that feel like loss to us, is the hope of the gospel. We keep our eyes on the vision of the Risen glorified Christ. With that vision before us, the in-between times, the times that are times of reflection and purpose, we can know that God is working all things out for our good and the good of us all. We are being reformed and transformed by God through the power of the Holy Spirit. The power and the glory of Christ is with us in all the ordinary times of our lives. Thanks be to God. Amen.