

From one season to the next

A sermon by the Rev. H. Paul Canady III

Rector of Christ Church, New Bern, NC, on February 11, 2018

http://lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Epiphany/BEpiLast_RCL.html

Once again, we find ourselves on the precipice of yet another season change, as we move from the season of hope-filled expectation, seeing Christ revealed in new and unexpected ways to a time filled with a different kind of anticipation, a time of self-reflection, self-denial, and time when “we & us” is takes root.

It is so appropriate that the Gospel on the Last Sunday after the Epiphany echos the Gospel on the First Sunday of Epiphany -- the echo is the voice of God making a sudden and distinct appearance. As we begin to transition from Epiphany to Lent, I hope we can take some time to think about what the voice of God sounds like.

For some, it may be as distinct as thunder on a summer afternoon. For others, it may sound like the wings of a bird or a gentle breeze. For others, the voice of God may sound like the laughter of a child or the story-telling of an elder.

Who knows... for each of us it may sound like a each of those or none of those at varying points in our life. And no doubt as we embark on this wilderness period of learning and growing, the voice of God may sound like all of those things and more. What is most important is that we listen for it. It may strike us as unexpectedly as it did Peter, James, and John on that mountain top. The ones whom Jesus called “the Rock” and the “Sons of Thunder” were so taken aback by the experience that they stumbled over their words, coming up with building plans until the voice of God spoke and everything went back to looking like it did before. Only, it wasn't like it was before. Peter, James and John were changed. Mark tells us (as do Luke & Matthew) that they said nothing to anyone. In Mark's telling, Jesus tells them to say nothing.

When we have an encounter with the holy, as Peter, James, and John did in the Gospel, and like Elisha does in our Hebrew Scripture reading, we are changed. And when we are able to do more listening and absorbing than we do talking and deflecting, then the change will be for the better. Elisha saw the his teacher and mentor swept up into Heaven and suddenly the burden of being the lead prophet was on him. But it was what God had called him to do, and God knew that Elisha couldn't live in to that if Elijah was still around. The Rock and the Sons of Thunder saw the closeness of God, too. I mean,

when Moses and Elijah are BOTH standing with the one you've confessed as "The Messiah of God" only a week earlier, it's hard to imagine being much closer. It's that closeness of God that we have the opportunity and the challenge to experience as we close out one season and begin another one.

The season of Lent invites us to renew our trust in God so that God can come closer to us and we can be closer to God. We are called to be somewhat those disciples on the mountain with Jesus: to absorb what's going on and to be in a place to hear the voice of God.

We are called, if not at least challenged, to lay aside our own wants and desires, to try and see what it is that God is saying to us, how it is that God is leading us, and where it is that God is calling us. I look forward to walking the road with you as we enter a season of deepened prayer, a season of listening for the voice of God, and a season of knowing the closeness of God.

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