

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Well here we are.

What a way to end Epiphany.

We began with the far off light of a star

and we're ending with the face of Jesus shining like the sun.

It is fitting, I think, that we end on the mountaintop.

Epiphany, our season of light will end this Wednesday, Ash Wednesday,

as we plunge into the valley, the darkness of lent.

The transfiguration

is one of those events in the Gospel

that our modern sensibilities have always had trouble with.

What, do you think, really happened up there?

There have been all sorts of attempts to explain this encounter.

Who's vision was it really?

Was it the thin air that made the apostles hallucinate?

Was this really just a misplaced resurrection story,

or an attempt at literary foreshadowing?

In the end I prefer to let the Gospel stand as it is.

We weren't there after all.

We can never know what really happened.

All we have to go on is the Gospel account.

Clearly this episode was important to the early church,

as it appears in all of the synoptic Gospels.

This begs the question,

What might it be about this event that made it so important?

What point are all the Gospel authors trying to make?

This is an important point to ponder.

I find it fascinating that Christ himself gives us a clue, I believe.

“Tell no one about the vision

until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

WHAT?!?

If this story is so important, why the injunction to keep it quiet?

Shouldn't we,

if you will pardon the irony,

be shouting it from the mountaintops?

If you actually saw something like this happen,

would you be able to keep it to yourself?

Well... as near as I can tell,

it looks to me like Jesus is asking for an information blackout  
as a case of simple practicality.

Think about it.

If you can't get your mind around the resurrection,

why waste time wrestling with the transfiguration.

The mystery of the transfiguration is, after all,

just one small part of the greater mystery of Christ.

This story startles us and grabs our attention,

but even more it points us toward the deeper reality of Christ.

Christian doctrine tells us that Christ is both fully human and fully divine,

but what does that really mean to us?

What are we to make of this Jesus,

the anointed one, the Christ,

the Son of God.

Like the disciples, it is easy for us to live with Jesus the man,

an intimate friend and companion on the journey;

a teacher of wisdom.

And even when the road gets hard

and our journey leads to Jerusalem and the cross

we know we have a steadfast companion in Jesus.

Sure, we may need to deny him on occasion,

if the risk to ourselves becomes too great,

but Jesus will understand.

He loves us for who we are.

And even when his face shines with the light of the sun,

it is a face of warmth and compassion

and understanding,

and even forgiveness.

This is the comfortable Jesus.

The safe Jesus.

The good shepherd we meet as a child

who watches over us and protects us.

This is the truly human Jesus,

the gentle Jesus.

But it is this comfortable and gentle Jesus

that gets obliterated in the cloud on Mount Tabor that day.

In the transfiguration,

for a brief but startling clear moment,

we see the Messiah, the Son of Man, the King of kings,

revealed in all his righteous glory.

We see beyond the merely human Jesus to the truly divine Jesus,

the second person of the blessed Trinity.

Sooner or later in our faith journey with Christ

we will have our mountaintop experience.

And this safe and comfortable Jesus

that we go to church to worship on Christmas and Easter,

or on Sundays when it is convenient,

becomes transfigured for us;

Within us.

The bright white cloud of God's presence surrounds us,

hiding us from the apprehensions of the everyday world

and the word and will of God speaks clearly in our hearts.

And the church becomes not a place we go to,

but something we are.

It is a time of joy and apprehension,

excitement and terror.

In a moment, we know!

In a flash, we are different.

In an instant, we are changed.

Like the Christ we worship, we too have become transfigured.

And we are never the same again.

And then Christ comes to us and touches us and gently says,

“Tell no one until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

This is the crux of the matter.

This is why, I think, this part of the Gospel is so important.

Tell no one?

TELL NO ONE?

Why?

For crying out loud, we have been transfigured!

We want to tell the world.

We want to shout it from the mountain top!

We want to take the great commission and conquer the world with it.

Jesus reminds his chosen of the chosen,

Peter, James and John,

that they have to wait.

Wait until the spark of the Spirit moves in the other

before they fan the flame.

And just in case it isn't obvious enough, I feel the need to say plainly,

Jesus is reminding *us* of this exact same thing.

Growing up as a Boy Scout,

one of the many lessons I learned was how to make a fire in the wilderness.

Like most lessons in Scouting, the important part is being prepared.

To make the journey from spark to campfire

requires patience, preparedness, and care.

Building the fires of faith in another requires no less.

Who knows how or where the spark of faith will come.

It is our task as Christians to be ready to nurture that spark into a flame

and that flame into a fire.

It is the reason we gather,

and the reason why we invite others to join us.

We are looking for sparks in the darkness.

We all have different amounts and characters of faith at different times.

Sometimes all we can bring is the soggy and rotting wood

of a faith that seems unworthy of the name.

Sometimes we bring the guttering flame of merely candle type faith,

light yes, but no heat,

and barely enough light to hold back the dark.

And sometimes we come with the faith of a roaring bonfire,

with light and heat enough for many to share.

When we gather together and share the faith we have,

with those who have it, and with those who don't,

and with everyone in between,

we have the opportunity to remember that faith is a precious gift,

and we can also learn how,

as the prayer book says,

“to commend the faith that is in us,”

or to continue my metaphor,

“to tend the fires of our faith.”

Alone, it can be a difficult task to build our faith.

Together we have the opportunity to learn when we can,

and support each other when we must.

It is a vital task.

When we let ourselves become lazy,

it is easy to think of the church

as something that will always be there for us when we need it.

We forget that without us, all of us, the church is nothing.

One hundred and twenty-six years ago

there was no Episcopal Church in Western Springs.

It is our responsibility to make sure that 126 years from now

there will still be an Episcopal Church in Western Springs.

To some that may seem a daunting task, but it is simple really.

We do it by inviting others to share in our joys and labors,

expectantly waiting to greet the light of Christ residing in each of them,

and together building and tending the sparks of faith we share.

As we again begin the holy journey of Lent this Wednesday,

I bid you reflect on the faith that you have been given,

the faith that you are responsible for.

Tend to it like the precious gift it is.

Share it abundantly with those in need.

Seek it out in all those you meet.

Nurture it in those around you.

Together we can keep All Saints Episcopal Church

the garden of faith, fountain of Grace, and source of new life

that God has always intended it to be.

Amen.