

Luke 9. 28-36 (St. Michael's – August 6, 2017)

'I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help.' So says the psalmist as he faces adversity. Look *up* in the day of trouble! This counsel is good for God's people at all times, but especially for us this week.

As you've probably heard, on Wednesday the South Carolina Supreme Court ruled, in a split 3-2 decision, that 29 churches of our diocese, including St. Michael's, must give our property and assets to the national Episcopal church. And so while this decision will certainly be appealed, we're looking at significant threat to our gospel ministry.

And so this morning, as we lift our eyes and respond not with fear but with faith, it's timely that our gospel passage is the transfiguration. This utterly unique moment in the life of Jesus where his glory is fully revealed.

And so my friends this morning let us surrender our anxiety, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, and let us be still and know that He is God.

Our passage begins in verse 28. Jesus chooses three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, and heads up on a mountain to pray. Why a mountain? Probably because there's something about getting *above* the hustle and bustle of life, that helps us encounter God. Moses met with God on a mountain. Elijah met with God on a mountain, and Jesus is going to meet with His Father. He's going to connect with the Almighty.

It's noteworthy that before every major event in his life, Jesus prays. Before his baptism, before choosing disciples, and even in the garden of Gethsemane before the cross. It's so important, when we face major decisions and challenges, to stop and pray. To really seek the Lord's voice.

I found it so encouraging last Friday that our new Archbishop, Foley Beach, called for a Day of Prayer and Fasting in response to the verdict. And so literally thousands of Anglicans around the world and praying for us right now, which is tremendously encouraging. Our archbishop understands how critically important it is, in trying times, to seek the Lord's face, to hear his voice.

And so Jesus is up on the mountain praying with his three disciples and as He prays, something happens. The gospels use different words to describe the moment, but it's dramatic. Jesus' face is changed and he begins to shine like the sun. Blinding, dazzling, radiant. For the one and only time on earth, his disciples see him as he truly is, God of God, light of light, very God of very God. They catch a glimpse of what John will see many years later in a vision: 'I saw one like the son of man, his hair was white as snow and his eyes were like flames of fire.'

And then suddenly, Jesus is not alone, but standing with two other men, Moses and Elijah. Truly heaven has come to earth. Those who have gone to be with the Lord are present with him again. And they're having a conversation.

And so if you've ever wondered – 'what are we going to talk about in heaven?' here's a glimpse. Verse 31, '[Together] they spoke of Jesus' departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.'

This is the supreme topic of conversation in the universe. Jesus' departure. It's actually not what the Kardashians are wearing.

And you know, Moses and Elijah could so easily have talked about other things, they could have reminisced. Moses could have said, 'You remember when I parted the Red Sea?' Elijah could have said, 'You remember when I called down fire from heaven.' But no, it's all about Jesus and his coming departure in Jerusalem.

It's striking that the Greek word here for 'departure' is 'exodus.' And so it's a departure, yes, but one with massive implications. As in the first exodus God rescued His people from bondage in Egypt, so in this second exodus will He rescue them from even greater tyranny – the tyranny of sin and death.

You know, sometimes in today's world it's easy to avoid talking about the cross. For many, the cross is a scandal, divine child abuse. For others it's not good breeding to bring up politics or religion.

But in the light of eternity, when we cut away all that is superficial, there will be *one* theme demanding our attention and adoration. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And Moses and Elijah, these two friends of God, are captivated by what is coming.

Yes, there is continuity in scripture. Moses is the giver of the Law, Elijah is the greatest of the prophets. Together they represent the entire OT. And their attention is wholly fixed on Jesus.

They're not accusing Jesus like the Pharisees, about how Jesus doesn't measure up to OT standards. And Jesus isn't censuring them about how narrow and harsh the OT was. No, we see here the harmony of the covenants, that Jesus is the fulfilment of everything Moses and Elijah longed for.

Now up to this point the disciples have been watching in silent awe. But finally, Peter does what he's want to do, and puts his foot in his mouth. 'Master, it's good that we are here. Let us make three tents. One for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.' You might say that Peter has an edifice complex – he's thinking of building projects when the kingdom of heaven is all around him.

Essentially, Peter doesn't want the moment to end. He wants to prolong and preserve the glory. He doesn't want to go back down the mountain into the grit and grime of everyday life. However, as one writer notes, 'Jesus doesn't need a shrine. He rejects every attempt to localize or institutionalize him.'

But it's such a temptation isn't it, when something good happens, to try to milk the moment. To bottle the lightning. But like manna in the desert, whenever we try to *preserve* our daily bread, it becomes wormy and rancid. The Lord calls us to walk by faith.

And finally, the Father speaks. God himself. 'This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him!' Now God rarely speaks audibly in scripture. He does so three times in the entire NT.

And there are so many things God could have said. So many mysteries he could have addressed. You know, 'predestination, the problem of suffering, infant baptism, the eucharist, Bigfoot, etc.'

But what is the one thing God wants his people to know? 'This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him!' Yes, above and beyond all other weighty matters in this universe, *this* is God's call us to.

In scripture, when someone is referred to as God's Son, it means the king. Solomon was called God's son. And 'Chosen One' is from Isaiah 42, where God says: 'Behold my servant...my chosen, in whom my soul delights.' Later in Isaiah we discover that this chosen servant will be a suffering servant, wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and by whose stripes we are healed.

And thus we come to perhaps the crux of the passage, 'Listen to Him!' What does it mean to listen to Jesus? Certainly it means to abide by his teaching, but could it mean something more?

I think so, because in the verses immediately before today's passage, this is what Jesus says: verse 22: 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.'

My friends, if there were any words we instinctively do not want to hear, that we are inclined to tune out, it is these. Words of suffering and sorrow and pain. And yet, these are the words of eternal life. The Son of man will suffer many things and be killed, and raised on the third day.

'This is my Son, my Chosen One, listen to him!' If anything, the transfiguration is a validation of Jesus' mission. The Father's stamp of approval. That as Jesus now turns his face to Jerusalem, His disciples will know, that this *is* God's perfect plan and purpose. Suffering is not an accident. And so in the moments of fear, when darkness reigns, they will remember the mountaintop, the glory, and the Father's voice.

And of course, what happens next in our passage? Jesus and the disciples come down the mountain into a broken, demon-haunted world, where they find a desperate father and a demonized child.

Last week I was in the mountains of Colorado with the Anglican Leadership Initiative. A team of clergy hiked deep into the back-country and spent 5 days camping at over 11,000 feet. It was a time of coaching, teaching, prayer, fasting, and most importantly, spending hours in solitude listening for the Father's voice.

Over the course of the week there were profound moments of encountering God on the mountain. But one of the things that was stressed, is that you can't live there. You can't pitch

your tent on the summit. As beautiful as it is, and as clearly as you can hear God's voice, nothing grows there. There's no life. At some point you need to go back down into the valley.

But the key is *remembering* what you heard in the rarified air, so that you don't lose it in the hustle and bustle and chaos of everyday life.

And so my friends, today we are enjoying the rarified air of worship. We are climbing out of the broken and messy valleys of life, and are abiding in the presence of the living God. In worship it's so much easier to let Jesus occupy center stage, isn't it, to let him be the king of our heart, the vision before our eyes.

But in a few moments we're going to head out into a world of uncertainty and anxiety and suffering. A world of hatred and rage where evil men will try to steal all that we hold dear.

And the challenge for us will be not to react, but to *remember* who is the beloved Son, the Chosen One, the King of Kings, and to remember that He has promised to be with us unto the end of the age, he has promised to bear our burdens, carry our sorrows, give us His perfect peace, and work all our sufferings out for good. He has called us to join Him in His great mission of redemption, and He has sealed these promises with his blood.

C.S. Lewis in his novel, the Silver Chair, has a profound scene that touches on this theme. Jill Pole is a young girl who's been called by Aslan into the land of Narnia. And suddenly she finds herself on a high mountain beholding the great lion himself. And Aslan commissions her with a task to find a lost prince. And Aslan gives Jill four signs that will guide her on her quest. And after giving the signs, these are Aslan's parting words:

Remember, remember, remember the signs. Say them to yourself when you wake up in the morning, and when you lie down at night, and when you wake in the middle of the night.

And whatever strange things may happen to you, let nothing turn your mind from following the signs.

And secondly, I give you a warning. Here on the mountain I have spoken to you clearly. I will not often do so down in Narnia. Here on the mountain, the air is clear and your mind is clear; as you drop down into Narnia the air will thicken. Take great care that it does not confuse your mind. And the Signs which you have learned here will not look at all as you expect them to look, when you meet them there. That is why it is so important to know them by heart and pay no attention to appearances. Remember the signs and believe the signs. Nothing else matters. And now, Daughter of Eve, farewell.

And so my friends, today as we head out into the world, may we remember the signs. The signs of our crucified and risen savior. May we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Beloved Son and Chosen One. And may we hearken to his voice.

To Him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.