

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

I seldom tell Ole and Lena jokes because there are often those folks, often Norwegian who just do not get them. I remember that at a family reunion probably 20 years ago, someone remarked that she had to talk real slow because of all the Norwegians who were there. About ten minutes later, one of our great aunts started laughing because she had just got the joke.

Now here this morning we have Peter, James and John who go up the mountain with Jesus for a transforming experience. I used to think that perhaps Peter was Norwegian because he just does not seem to get it. Picture the scene, up on the mountain, the three of them with Jesus, and Jesus is suddenly transfigured, his clothes become dazzling white as our gospel describes them, and if that is not enough, suddenly Elijah and Moses are there with Jesus. The greatest of the prophets, the one who is to appear before the coming of the Messiah, and with him, the prophet who led the people from captivity in Egypt to the promised land.

Peter seems to babble, "it is good for us to be here. Let us make three dwellings..." But you know I do not think he was babbling at all. Oh, he did not "get it" as they say, but in respect to Jewish tradition, we should acknowledge that the Jewish people fully expected God to dwell, to tabernacle with them again. This is indicated because in Greek the root of the word translated as "dwellings" is the root used for tabernacle or tent as in "the Word became flesh and dwelt (or tabernacled)" among us." Adding to the tradition that Peter intentionally or not is honoring, is the idea that this is literally a mountaintop experience, and who wants it to end? Not Peter, nor I dare say, James or John. We don't want what we regard as our mountaintop experiences to end. We want to stay and build our dwellings on mountaintop experiences. But we come down from the mountain.

Now six days before this mountain top experience of Peter, James and John, Jesus asked the question "who do people say that I am?" Peter answered "you are the Christ." Now the Transfiguration experience certainly confirms Peter's confession, and it is the highpoint between Jesus' baptism and the crucifixion. But Peter, James and John miss the point. Of course this same theme, of Jesus teaching in a parable or doing a miracle is not understood by those closest to him. We are not too much different today, two thousand years later as we want to keep those special days as a shot in the arm, a spiritual shot in the arm. We do not really want to go back to the routine. But this is the way it is, life is not about dramatic experiences being normative and your faith is not lacking if they do not happen regularly.

Both Moses and Elijah had mountaintop experiences during their earthly lifetimes, they appear in this mountaintop experience as well, where Jesus sets the stage for the greatest revelation of God's glory, a revelation that takes place through a human being, Jesus. "This is my Son, the beloved, listen to him!" God in the midst of life, not through

the law as given by Moses, nor through words from a prophet, but through a living human being, not at a distance, but in the flesh.

They come down the mountain, and the transfiguration leads to suffering, pain and the cross. And we must acknowledge that suffering and pain can come of following Jesus and bearing our cross. But this is what it means to be a disciple. This is what it means to be called by Jesus, even if it looks like we are out of step with the world. Following Jesus means following him on his way to the cross, the tomb, then to the resurrection. Following Jesus means that we are here Sunday morning and often during the week, it means we stand with the poor, it means we speak for those who have no voice in society, it means that we look at what we buy, what we eat, the ways we spend our money, the way we raise our children and it means that we are out of step with many of those around us.

This coming Wednesday is the day we call "Ash Wednesday," those of you who are here will be marked with the cross of Christ on your forehead, you will be reminded that you are dust and to dust you shall return. Those of us who have ashes on our foreheads this Wednesday are often looked at askance by those who see us, after all, who wants to be reminded that we are dust and will to dust we will return. But it is the way of the cross, it is following Jesus as a disciple. It is out of step and it is counter cultural, it is difficult, even upsetting, it means we do not go with the flow, we do make waves, we do that which is pleasing to God.

To follow Christ is to do as he did, teach, heal, forgive, to bear witness to the forgiving love that is revealed in Christ Jesus. Our task is to tell others about the glory of God, the Good News. The purpose of our faith isn't to experience repeated spectacular, dramatic, mountaintop experiences. The task of our faith is to tell others, moved by the Holy Spirit, given in baptism, nourished by scripture and the Lord's Supper, the Spirit who calls us to reflect God's glory in our lives.

I know we have doubts, questions, fears, we are not always loving and forgiving, we have failings and shortcomings, we suffer from discouragement at times. We share all these things with the original disciples. And like them, we have the same answer, the answer given by God, the answer to all of it, Christ Jesus! Not only our example, but also the giver of our call to follow and the giver of our power to follow. He forgives and renews when we fail, and that is the point, Jesus through the cross and resurrection makes it possible for you and me to be transfigured as God's beloved children.

AMEN