

Last Sunday after Epiphany Year B

Old Testament 2 Kings 2:1-12

When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent."

Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."

Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

The Epistle 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel Mark 9:2-9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus. As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Prayer:

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

-AMEN

Sermon:

Today's Gospel describes the Transfiguration of Jesus. ⁱ

It's an interesting event. ⁱⁱ

If you read it with a modern skeptical eye,

- You'd notice that people usually don't start glowing all of a sudden, like it says Jesus did. ⁱⁱⁱ
- You'd think that if a person starts hearing voices from heaven, they probably need their meds adjusted.

Skepticism makes sense, sometimes.

Charlatans make money, but skeptics make money too.

Skeptics give us balance.

But, I know that God reaches out to people,

in lots of different ways.

God did that 2,000 years ago.

And God still reaches out to us, today.

I think that things happened in the New Testament

Pretty much they they're described.

Whatever happened back then, one key point is :

We often base both our identity and our self-worth
on what we look like on the “outside”.

I do. For sure.

I'd like to be taller, and have more hair.

Less round and more ripped.^{iv}

Don't we all fall into that trap? After all, we're only human!

In our everyday world, we are hounded about how we look.

Women especially feel this pressure.

Our age. Our gender. Our hair color. Our weight.

Our fashion sense. Our absurdly white teeth.

The world's song is simply this:

You are never good enough.^v

You can never have too much stuff.^{vi}

We are told that life is all about us,

And trapped in an endless cycle of production and consumption,...

We become the world's ultimate consumer's, and

Every generation ... becomes the next “Me” generation.

But you know what?

God focuses on our inside. On our heart. On our love.

God focuses on our inside.

Where our wounds are slowest to heal.

God wants us to be healed, from the inside out.

But God wants that healing process to show on the outside.

He shines! And He wants us to shine.

Shine, Jesus, shine

Fill this land with the Father's glory

Blaze, Spirit, blaze

Set our hearts on fire

Flow, river, flow

Flood the nations with grace and mercy

Send forth your word

Lord, and let there be light!^{vii}

Today's Gospel is reminiscent of the Old Testament story

Where Moses came down from a mountain,

after an encounter with God.

Moses' face shined bright, because he reflected God's glory!^{viii}

Sort of like today's story about Jesus.

Except Moses was a man.

While Jesus was God!

Moses ended up pretty special.

Moses was a great leader,

but he started life as a regular person. *Like us.*

He began as a baby floating down stream in a pitch covered basket.

Headed for his doom, he was rescued by a Princess –

Like a Walt Disney story!-

And Moses did a lot of good work.

But he also messed up. A lot.

In fact Moses got so bad that God let him take his people to

the River Jordan, so they could cross to the Promised Land,

But Moses had to stay behind.

It's like being sent to bed without dinner.

For a thousand years!

Moses, was a great guy but he was just a person.

Like you. Like Me.

Yet, even Moses got to shine with God's light.

If we get out of the way ...

if we just say "Yes",

God will shine through us, too.

There is no dried up old tree that God cannot transform
into a stalwart oak, or a fragrant pine.

Moses wasn't perfect! And we don't have to be perfect, either.
We just have to say Yes, when God comes calling!

In his Epistle^{ix} St. Paul described God's command to His people:
"Let light shine out of darkness...."^x

God calls us to shine our light in the darkness.

We are called to allow God to work within us,
We are called to make room so God can liberate others,
from whatever binds them.
We are called to uncover the light,
which God has called them to shine.

God is at work. Right here. Right now.

Let's not get bogged down.

Let's remember who we are and who we are called to be.

Seek Jesus! Keep your eyes peeled!

He's everywhere, in the midst of our everyday world!

We get so busy, thinking ahead...

We can overlook the little things.

What really matters is not always obvious.

God usually reaches out in subtle ways.

Listen carefully.

Keep your eyes open.

Watch for His hand at work in your life.

Once, years ago, two lawyers were fighting over big accident case.

The Plaintiff's lawyer was a wreck:

Self-Centered. Mean. Manipulative. *No fun at all.*^{xi}

Anyway, during a break, his secretary handed him an envelope.

He snatched it out of her hand,

took a quick peek inside and gave it back,

without saying a word.

Later, he asked her for to bring that envelope back,

And she said she didn't have it.

He said to her, quite firmly,

"Yes - you do – I just gave it back to you."

The secretary said,

"*Oh*, I didn't know you still needed that...

... it's already been recycled".

And she added, with a *slight smile*:

"It's your office policy. Save the earth."^{xii}

Living in God's Kingdom is about being nice.

We do need to save the earth, our island home.

We do need to make sure that the world we make
is a place where we want to be.

When we get caught up in our anxious, worrisome world,

It's easy to lose sight of the good work that Jesus calls to do.

Let's all try to remember that

Every day Jesus *calls to do whatever we can,*
To build his Father's Kingdom. *Right here.*

You matter. I matter. We matter. *God says so.*

So, it matters when we help someone get through life's bumps.

It matters when you support your church,
and help it be a safe place,
a house of refuge.

It matters when you love your spouse, and forgive an old pain.

It matters when we plant a tree or rescue a dog or a cat.

When we live in the Kingdom, we are living with a God whose light

Is brighter than the sun ...

When we live in the Kingdom, we live with a God whose brilliant

glow lights our path, wherever we go!

When we live in the Kingdom, we live in wonder, and amazement,
With a God who created us for His joy.

Living in the Kingdom is about living on the Mountaintop.

- Don't scorn a prophet's ecstasy; instead, be a prophet.
- Don't mock a dreamer's vision; instead, build your own dream.
- Don't scorn a worshipper's conviction; instead
listen to God, and be convicted yourself.

Sacred moments happen every day.

Sir Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa, Norgay Tenzing,
climbed Mt Everest.^{xiii} And that changed their lives.

Sir Edmund became dedicated to building schools and hospitals
For the Sherpa's in Nepal.

He established a trust to help those mountain people,
For generations.

Most people who climb Mt. Everest aren't that moved.

They don't think much about the Sherpas.

But, Sir Edmund did.

God sends each of us our own vision.

He calls each of us to our own transformation.

God calls us, in His own way. In His own time.

But *God has called you. God will call you.*

Be alert. Listen carefully.

Let Jesus shine!

Amen.

ⁱ 2 Kings 2:1-12 is often misread to show that Elijah, who was Elisha's father and teacher, was taken to heaven by a fiery chariot. This is not correct and misses a key point of the pericope. Rather, and notably, here Elijah is established as the Moses' successor, while Elisha is the new Joshua. In the pericope at issue, while 50 protective men stood at a distance, on the banks of the River Jordan, "Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground." Moses was not the only guy who parted the river Jordan! Control over the elements, as an agent of Yahweh, is a common OT theme.

Thus, Elijah crossed to the far side of the Jordan, which, like Moses, he also parted. Moments later, a fiery chariot (a symbol of God's utter sovereignty) separated Elijah from Elisha; this reflected Yahweh's decision that Elijah's work was completed, while Elisha still had work to do, here. Elisha, returned to Israel, to carry on his people's conquest of the region, beginning with Jericho. (See, Thomas L. Brodie, *The Crucial Bridge: The Elijah-Elisha Narratives as an Interpretive Synthesis of Genesis-Kings and a Literary Model for the Gospels* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999). It is often misunderstood that Elijah was, taken to heaven in a fiery chariot (see below). Notably, the OT provides that, "Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven".



ii It's a famous story, told, with minor variations, in all three of the Synoptic Gospels.

iii The more things change, the more they are the same. Today, we've plenty of magic:

- Your cell phones are more powerful than the systems that sent people to the moon.

The Internet connects us instantly to people half way

- across the globe, and translates our language into theirs.
- In Northern Europe worshippers are looking back 1,000 years, in temples for gods like Thor, Frigg and Oden. Of course, it's a sort of paganism lite, since they skip the animal and human sacrifices.

iv Is my beard too short or is too long? Wish I was taller, or leaner. Wish I had more hair, or less hair, or different hair.

v Thank You, Jesus! For you, it's what's inside that really matters. That's why in his "transfiguration" Jesus revealed his "inner self".

^{vi} But, the World says, it's always possible not to have enough. Former Sheriff Robert Chody, of Williamson County hasn't yet found much peace in life, after winning Texas' largest lottery and bringing home \$51 million. He lost his reelection attempt, after spending millions of dollars, and is facing felony charges for professional misconduct.

^{vii} Kendrick, Graham, A. , Shine Jesus Shine, © Make Way Music

^{viii} See, Exodus 34:29

^{ix} to the Church in Corinth.

^x And that light was God's glory, shining bright in Jesus!

^{xi} Turn away from the trappings of authority and society, and of political correctness or incorrectness, and of rank or power, or youth or age.

^{xii} *Great idea. Bad execution.*

^{xiii} In 1953.