

Sunday, March 2, 2014
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon – “From Ordinary to Extraordinary”

I want to focus our time this morning on Peter, James and John.

Why do you think Jesus chose these three men to accompany him on this remarkable journey?

Do you think it was because they were the most trusted – the ones who Jesus believed would understand his divinity and carry his message forward in the months ahead?

Was it an honor for Peter, James and John to climb this mountain with Jesus, to see Moses and Elijah, to hear the voice of God?

Or...were these three the most skeptical?

I wonder if these were the disciples who had failed to understand that they have been in the presence of God for the past few years.

Perhaps Jesus decided that he would give it one more try, to allow these three men to witness the extraordinary appearance of the ancestors and to hear the voice from heaven.

What do you think? Which group would you be in?

On that holy mountain Jesus was transformed from an ordinary man, in the eyes of his disciples, to an extraordinary being, glowing like the sun.

This is what God does.

God sheds his light on the ordinary and everything changes.

Peter, James and John were the most ordinary men when Jesus called them to follow.

They were not recognized by society as men of accomplishment, nor men of knowledge or faith.

They were simple fishermen, but by God's grace they were transformed into the foundation of our church and the messengers of God's good news.

When we come to this communion table, we take the most ordinary elements of bread and juice to remind us of God's power and grace.

When we celebrate this holy sacrament, we place ourselves in God's presence – together with our ancestors, with our fellow Christians throughout the world.

We come to the table as ordinary individuals, but together we become the Body of Christ.

What a miracle.

As Peter, James and John stood together on that mountain, witnessing the transfiguration of Christ, I'm sure that their minds were reeling with questions:

What does this mean? How could this happen? What is going on here?

God answers their questions plainly and clearly:

This is my Son, the beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

This is the same message that God delivers to us when we are overwhelmed by life's circumstances.

This is my Son, the beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

Let's look at each part:

This is my Son, the beloved: God affirms his connection to Jesus reminding the disciples that even the beloved of God can be sentenced to death.

Sometimes the beloved of God will find themselves in situations that seem untenable.

However, no matter the situation, a beloved child of God remains just that -beloved forever.

With him I am well pleased: Jesus has been travelling and teaching, ministering to the sick and the marginalized for just a few years.

He has gained many followers, but an equal number of detractors and enemies.

His goal of bringing God's kingdom to reality has not been recognized.

His disciples might be feeling that they have been misled – or naïve in their belief.

God says, "No."

God says that he is pleased with the life of Jesus and this translates into an invitation for us.

We are reminded that lives of grace and holiness are not always the most popular or successful.

If there are times in your life when you feel that you haven't reached your potential or fulfilled your dreams, remember your Savior, Jesus – three short years of ministry resulting in over two millenniums of transformed lives.

Listen to him: This is the hardest part. Listening to Jesus.

We've just come through the season of Epiphany, hearing the Sermon on the Mount and the many stories of healing and compassion.

We have heard from Jesus some lessons that are difficult to embody:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted in Christ's name.

We have been challenged to put aside old ways and adopt the teachings of this radical prophet.

We move into Lent with these words on our hearts.

I share a poem by Ann Weams, simply titled *Lent*

*Lent is a time to take the time
To let the power of our faith story take hold of us,
A time to let the events
get up and walk around in us,
A time to intensify
Our living unto Christ,
A time to hover over
The thoughts of our hearts,
A time to place our feet in the streets of Jerusalem
Or to walk along the sea and listen to his word,
A time to touch his robe
And feel the healing surge through us,
A time to ponder and a time to wonder...
Lent is a time to allow a fresh new taste of God!*

I have always viewed Lent as a time of opportunity.

A time when we can try on new ways of practicing our faith.

We can experiment with different ways of moving closer to God.

This Lent, I invite you to do something different – make some sort of change in your daily routine, simply to allow a bit of space for God's light to find its way in.

I am quite certain that Peter, James and John were never the same after their day on the mountain with Jesus.

What they leave us, by way of their story, is the great hope, the expectation that God will break through the clouds and speak to us.

We know what lies ahead for Jesus in the next six weeks – but we also know what happens on Easter Sunday.

As we approach this holiest season of our liturgical year, I encourage you to embrace your faith with a passion.

Turn to God. Listen for God's voice.

Look for evidence of the Holy Spirit active in your life.

Learn to pray. Learn to be still. Practice trust.

I came across a lovely story this week about Katherine White – wife of the author of *Charlotte's Web*, E.B. White.

Katherine, described as a brilliant editor at the New Yorker, was an avid gardener.

During the last autumn of her life – knowing that her days were drawing to a close, she planted a garden that would bloom the following spring. EB White described it this way:

As the years went by and age overtook her, there was something comical yet touching in her bedraggled appearance on this awesome occasion—the small, hunched-over figure, her studied absorption in the implausible notion that there would be yet another spring, oblivious to the ending of her own days, which she knew perfectly well was near at hand, sitting there with her detailed chart under those dark skies in the dying October, calmly plotting the resurrection.

My friends, we are an Easter people. We believe in resurrection.

If there are areas of your life that bring you sadness or pain, place those cares at the foot of the cross.

Allow yourself to move boldly into Lent fully intending to reach Easter Sunday with a heart full of joy!