

## **A Sermon for the Last Sunday after the Epiphany, February 15, 2015**

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*In the Name of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*"...a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; Listen to him!" Mark 9:7*

On this Last Sunday after the Epiphany, our readings give us the reassurance that God is always present with us in times of transition. Life is a constant journey of transitions that begin the moment we enter this world from the safety of our mother's womb. You and I have vivid memories of some of the many transitions we have faced over our lives as we were growing up and as we went through new experiences ourselves or with those whom we loved. A vivid memory for me, for example, is that of the day our oldest son went off to school for the first time at the age of five and a half. I remember as if it were yesterday standing with Jeannie by the street in front of our house at 4 West End Avenue in Westborough, Massachusetts with David as we waited for the bus. As that big yellow bus arrived and the door opened, we watched as our little boy's feet disappeared behind the door and the bus drove away. I still remember the lump I felt in my throat that day. It was a day of transition. Our son was facing a new chapter in his young journey and our life was changing as well.

Life is full of transitions. Some are happy ones, the beginning of a marriage, the arrival of a child, the pride of seeing a child come of age and find his or her way in life, the joy of grandchildren, reaching decision to be able to retire after a fruitful career. Some are difficult transitions, the loss of one's health, the loss of a loved one, the loss of a pet, the loss of the security we found in the familiar, facing the unknown. In all of life's transitions, there is always the element of change and change brings with it its own challenges. It is often a natural thing for you and me to face transitions with anxiety. For a parish such as ours right now, transitions can be times of uncertainty, yet they can also be times for hope.

Today's readings describe God's engagement in the world in times when God's people found themselves in transition. In the first reading from the Second Book of Kings we hear the story of Elijah and Elisha. We hear the anguish of the prophets as the mantle of leadership is passed. We witness the faithfulness of Elisha who yearned to have his master stay and not leave. Elisha refuses to be left behind by Elijah despite the warnings of the prophets. Elijah tries to leave his disciple behind but Elisha insists on travelling with him. During that long journey from Bethel to Jericho both Elisha and Elijah were in transition. Even with God in charge, the journey was difficult. The desire for the old ways to remain in tact persisted. There was the hesitation to take on anything new. Finally, the presence of God in the parting of the waters as Elisha watched Elijah's departure gave the assurance that all would be well. In God's own time and with God's blessing, the time had come for a new age to be born. It was time for Elisha to take on a prophetic leadership even it would be with fear and trembling. God was with Elisha in that transition.

In Mark's gospel we see yet another story of transition, albeit a reluctant one at first. In the story of the Transfiguration, we find Peter, James, and John with Jesus as they first experience a vision of Moses and Elijah. Immediately, they want so much to hold on to this vision of Jesus and the prophets. They want to build structures in which to preserve what they had experienced on that mountain. They wanted so much to hold on to a way of life they had known so well. They wanted to cling to their familiar way of being faithful. Suddenly, when the vision changed and Jesus was transfigured and appeared alone before them, it became clear to them that something new was happening. It is important for us to note that in both of these stories from the Old Testament and from Mark's gospel, the powerful voices of the old are not denied or negated but rather, are passed on to new leaders. While there would be fear in change those called were able to move on and say yes to God's call.

As we continue here at Epiphany to discern God's call to us as individuals and as a congregation in this time of transition, what might these lessons this morning say to us? How do we hold on to those traditions that are true and ageless and how do we, at the same time, embrace that which has the promise to bring new life and renewal to our common life? What is the gospel saying to us and how might we find the hope to move peacefully and patiently through this time of transition. I remember some years ago when someone who knew me well gave me one of those little wall plaques, you know, the ones that have clever little messages on them. This plaque read, "Dear God, I pray for patience, and I want it right now!" I suspect that most of us experience at one time or another the need to see things move faster than they seem to be moving. It is not easy sometimes to live with uncertainty. Our time frame is often not God's time frame.

Let us look again at what Jesus' disciples were experiencing on that mountain top. First of all, it is believed that Peter, James, and John were the three disciples closest to Jesus, yet even they were having difficulty understanding what was happening as Jesus was trying to prepare them for what was to come. They wanted so much to live in the security of things as they were. Peter blurted out, "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 was at a loss for what to say because they were afraid of the unknown and wanted to keep things as they had known them. But then, a cloud overshadowed them and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; Listen to him!"

During any time of transition, it is a really helpful thing for us to try as best we can to be patient, to be still, and to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, the best thing we can do is to listen, to listen to one another, for in the voices of others we can sometimes hear the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. I had a wonderful conversation with a member of this congregation who offered one of the best pieces of wisdom I've heard in some time. This person said, "It's sometimes important that we hold our opinions lightly." The moment she said that, I thought, "I wish I'd said that—indeed I shall by sharing with you her words of wisdom and of grace. Indeed, it's sometimes important that we be willing to listen and in so doing, hold our own opinions lightly. We can experience much grace when we listen.

God is always with us in times of transition, be they times of personal transition, or be it a time of transition for us here at Epiphany as this parish prepares to call a new priest to serve among you. That same voice of God that spoke to Peter James and John on that mountain top speaks to us today; "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!" May our listening be for us together a time of peace and of hope for things to come. *Amen.*