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 Epiphany Last – A Cycle
 Ex 24:12-18, Ps 2, 2 Peter 1:16-21, Matt 17:1-9

God's Transfiguring Dream

*O God, help us to be attentive to your Spirit, as to a lamp shining
 in a dark place, until the ... morning star rises in our hearts. Amen.*
 (2 Peter 1:19)

Moses going up to Sinai, David establishing his throne, Peter proclaiming the shining light of the Holy Spirit, and God's own glory revealed in the face of Jesus transfigured in light: these are rich and dramatic scriptures today! What's going on with the lectionary??

Well, it is the Last Sunday of the Epiphany season, and this Sunday always takes the Transfiguration story as its main text. We draw Epiphany to a close, a season of God's in-breaking light, with this majestic, and mysterious event. Over these last weeks, we've been reading stories of Jesus' ministry, of calling disciples, teaching followers, working miracles, and all of a sudden we stop short to hear about this strange, mountaintop experience in his life and in the lives of his three closest disciples. Looking back, the scriptures of the Epiphany season are about mission and ministry. It is a time of blessed busyness. But today we are reminded, that once in a while amazing, unexpected, glorious things can happen in the midst of daily life and work. We are reminded that once in a while an interruption is a blessing, especially if it refocuses us on what we are really doing, and what our busyness is for! In the Gospel, the Transfiguration is that kind of event. It refocuses Jesus on his mission, and it is from here that he makes the fateful decision to leave Galilee behind, and move on to Jerusalem.

We have a lot of very busy people in today's scriptures. Moses is busy liberating a people from oppression, but his visit to the mountaintop reminds him and the people, that their liberation in itself is not THEIR mission. The story reminds us that their liberation is a PART of God's SAVING mission. In the Psalms, we hear about David building a more just society and protecting it from those who would dismember it. But the psalmist reminds us that protecting our models of justice may only be a part of God's saving mission. Peter is busy teaching early Christians that the message of the Gospel has Good News for them and for the world, but he reminds them that this message will

lead them BEYOND their current understandings, and motivations. And Matthew tells us the story of one busy preacher and three busy disciples who take a prayer break on a mountain, and there, they face the glorious revelation that THEY ARE ALL PART OF SOMETHING MUCH LARGER than each of them had or COULD ever imagine.

Every one of these scripture passages has a mountaintop in it. From Mount Sinai, to Mount Zion, to Mount Tabor, we are invited into the mystery of what the theologian Verna Dozier called *the dream of God*. It is God's vision for our ultimate well-being, and for the well-being of all creation. This dream appears, like these various mountaintops, in different places at different times. Sometimes it shines like a fiery beacon; sometimes it is shrouded behind dark clouds; and sometimes it is found in the beaming face of a just man or woman.

It reminds me of a saying: *We do not have a mission; we are part of God's mission. The Church does not have a mission; it is part of GOD's mission.* We often confuse our small piece of the picture for the whole picture and worse yet: we get discouraged if others don't see our small piece as the whole picture! The Last Sunday of Epiphany is the perfect time to ask ourselves: What is God's mission for us here in Prince George's County? How is our congregation part of GOD's dream? How are WE being transformed by GOD this time and place? In the last few years we have sometimes heard people deviously talk about something called 'alternative facts' ... but what is really behind such talk is ALTERNATIVE DREAMS. Remember: dreams are transforming and can even be transfiguring. The disciples learned that the *dream of God* transfigured Jesus; it transformed his life and suffused his being. IT MATTERS, *IT MATTERS ETERNALLY*, WHAT DREAM AND WHOSE VISION WE FOLLOW. It matters because that will transform and perhaps transfigure our lives. There are no alternative facts. There are only alternative visions. Follow the wrong dream, and we can *dis-figure* our lives! Follow the right one, and we can trans-form our lives.

The difficult thing about mission and ministry is keeping perspective. On the one hand, God's mission is much bigger than our small patch of ministry, and we are constantly in danger of equating our tasks with God's. On the other hand, there is no such thing as *generic* ministry. God's mission ALWAYS unfolds *in particular* places. God's dream always calls particular people to do

particular things. It is all about the unfolding of God's saving grace in history. So it is helpful to ask, how has God's saving grace been at work in our congregation. Over the course of a few centuries in the past, God called people here. We know there is a long history of mission and ministry in this place. But the real question is: why has God called us here, today? What is the ***transfiguring power*** of God doing in our lives, and the lives that we touch in our little corner – this corner where people have prayed, served, mourned and rejoiced for a few hundred years?

The temptation, at every point, is to say, "We've done it!" Like Peter, we may wish to build a pious memorial here. But the Spirit is always active, calling us deeper into the dream of God. So where does that leave us today?

Perhaps we can take a cue from these scriptures. Is there a Mount Sinai experience before us? Is the dream of God calling us to a deeper AND MORE CONCRETE way of being in covenant with God and one another? Is there a Mount Zion experience before us? Is the dream of God calling us to establish a place set apart for compassion and justice? Is there a Mount Tabor experience before us? Is the dream of God lighting our way to proclaim the Good News out and away from our little corner? All of this is what our joint grant committee will be working on in the *Seeds of Renewal Project* over the next few months.

We have to look for the signs of God's dream, in our individual lives and in our lives as a faith community. Mountaintops are wonderful, sacred, maybe even transfiguring, places: but they always call us to look out over the world that is around us, and GO BACK DOWN INTO IT. And so I'll end my remarks this morning, where I began, with the prayer from Second Peter: *O God, help us to be attentive to your Spirit, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until ... the morning star rises in our hearts. Amen*