

Last Sunday after Epiphany (AGM Sunday) – 26 February 2017

Exodus 24:12-18; Matthew 17:1-9

This morning we are celebrating the final Sunday in Epiphany, which means that Lent is upon us in three short days, but it is also our AGM Sunday, when we gather to discuss the ways that God has worked through us in this place over the past twelve months and as we discern what God is calling us forward to in the next twelve months or more. A lot is happening, much could be interpreted – a lot like our readings from Exodus and Matthew from scripture. Quick events that seem to take little time, but which hold, like our Parish Community, so much more than meets the eye.

What are some of the elements of these lessons that might help us as we head into our AGM in just a little while? The place ... the atmosphere ... the new thing beginning ... These are all parts of Moses' and the disciples' stories that may seem similar to us as we gather, celebrate, and are commissioned by God this very day.

First of all, where do these stories take place? They are both set on the top of mountains. Although the scripture passages are short, we know that they are not short on time. There were no ski-lifts to run Moses up that mountain. No helicopters to drop Peter, James, John and Jesus atop the peak. What is implied in these stories is a great, and probably difficult, journey as they toiled up the mountain, supplies in hand, to participate in what? They couldn't have known what was actually going to happen when they got there. Moses knew that God was going to reveal the law to him but he could not know just what that would entail; how life-changing this event was going to be, both for Moses and for all the Israelites. Jesus may have known what to expect but it is obvious in the narrative that the disciples were caught unawares, not knowing what they should do or how they should react. All of these biblical characters headed out on a journey up a mountain, and they weren't even sure what they would find at the top?

Does that seem familiar? As we gather year after year, recognizing more and more as we mature as a community of faith, that this journey we are making as Christians isn't always easy. As a matter of fact, there are probably many times when it seems like it is all uphill. We are journeying together, up a mountain, to a destination we can't be sure of. And yet we continue, year after year, month after month, day after day, clomping up that mountain, knowing that we do so not out of mandate or because we have nothing better to do ... but out of a desire to see what's up top, to discover what God might show us when we crest that peak and take a look at the world from the vantage point of being up there with God. You see, in both passages we are told that at the top of the mountain, God appeared to those who were faithful enough to begin the journey and then follow through on it.

When all of our cast of characters get to the top of the mountain, do they see a clear path to the horizon? Is their view one of beautiful valleys and other mountaintops? Nope! While they are there they are enveloped in clouds. What should have been crystal clear now becomes even more blurry. They were probably expecting that their new vantage point would bring them clarity and vision but quite to the contrary, their very faculty of vision was removed from them. But it wasn't removed to *keep them* from seeing clearly. It was removed so that they could actually see *more clearly*. God knew that were they to catch sight of where they had come from they would be entranced with looking back and thinking how amazing the trip had been. But God wanted their attention focussed solely on him – so he removed the distraction with what seemed like a distraction. The cloud that kept them from seeing was the very cloud from which God would speak. Their old way of sensing what was important - their sight – gave way to a new and more powerful way of sensing – their hearing. Because they could no longer see, they were able to hear. And it was from within that cloud which limited their vision that God was able to get their attention to share a bigger vision with them – God's own vision.

We seem to be living in a time when everything is blurry and scary and unpredictable. We used to be able to predict where and when God would speak to us. We used to be able to count on people just coming to God with us, without us having to do any leading or guiding. It used to be so clear, the path to God was the Church and people could see for themselves and wind up here on their own. But now the way is cloudy. The path just isn't so clear. And in that cloudiness and blur we can lament that times have changed and our sense of vision seems to have been lost... Or we can tune in our sense of hearing to listen to what God is saying to us – the message he is sharing that we couldn't hear before because the sights around us were too clear and beautiful and distracting ...

Once Moses and Jesus and the disciples all got to their mountaintops and were finally able to clearly recognize God in their midst (something that seemed to elude them often enough before) they are commissioned with a new beginning. Clearly, they will not go back down that mountain the same men that went up. When you meet God face to face, even though it is cloudy, you are transfigured. You can't help but be transformed. Just as Moses, and Peter, and James and John came back down that mountain changed men, stronger in their faith, so too will we come back down our mountain transformed, transfigured ...

Fifty years ago, when the newest configuration of the physical St. James was built, the congregation of that day came down their mountain transfigured and began the work of transfiguring Armdale to the glory of God in this world. They clomped up the mountain that was the past, they listened for God's voice in the cloud, and they allowed him to change them – both literally and spiritually – and they began a new thing here in this place. We are now being called to listen, as they did, as God speaks to us from the cloud that is our times. God is calling us to

become a transfigured community and now we have to accept the challenge to become the Faith Family of St. James, which happens to worship in Armdale, that God is envisioning for us.

We aren't yet ready to go back down the mountain. We have listening to do. We have visioning and dreaming and hoping and elbow-grease-working-hard-doing-what-God-needs-us-to-do stuff to do before God will release us from the mountaintop to go back into the world to take the Good News of God's love to all who are around us. And that listening begins today, at our AGM. We won't be having table groups and focus questions but we will have items called "New Business" that have come from your midst, and are, I believe, definitely words that God is speaking to us as He prepares us for the mission He has envisioned for this phenomenal, fabulous, amazing community of people who call themselves Members of St. James.