

Year A - Lent Two – 12 March 2017

Genesis 12:1-4a; Romans 4:1-5,13-17; Matthew 17:1-9

Welcome to this second Sunday in Lent. I have been praying that this time has been, and will continue to be, a time of reflection and pondering; a time of allowing yourself to look at the world around you with eyes that see the questions that come with not knowing what is next and how you will be called to respond and react. This season needs to be one in which you are willing to wait and wonder. It is a time when it's more appropriate to simply listen to the silence through which God speaks, than it is to keep your selves so busy that you numb your selves to the nudge or the pull that the Holy Spirit makes upon you. This is a season that reminds us that it isn't okay to predetermine how everything is going to unfold; a season in which we all need to let go of the inner "control freak" and simply begin to trust that God is in control and all shall be well.

This is also a season which throws at us the need to accept that we must look at things from a different perspective. Not many weeks ago, we were still in the throes of the post-Christmas/ Epiphany mindset in which we listened to the stories from Scripture still enveloped in the rosy glow of Jesus in the manger and the Wise Men presenting him with gold, frankincense and myrrh. But we're not there anymore. Quite the opposite – we are no longer gazing upon the beginning of Jesus' life as a child – now we are peering down the road to the end of Jesus' life as a man. We have left the road leading from Bethlehem and we have set our course for Jerusalem. The times have changed and so must our perspective.

Some of you may have noticed that our Gospel this morning is the same as that which we had a few weeks ago. Once again, we are listening to the story of the Transfiguration. We have heard God's voice saying, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased." We have been reminded once again of Peter's desire to leap in and "do" something, because we know he struggles with just "being" in Jesus' presence. (Peter is a "doer", not a contemplate-er ...)

We have already heard this story recently, so why do we have to listen to it again? We listen to it again because this time our perspective has changed. No longer are we focussing on Jesus as beginning his earthly ministry. This time, as we listen in Lent, we are focussed on what is bound to happen – this Gospel is not presented as the beginning of the life to be lived as a teacher and friend, but rather it is now being presented as the beginning of the journey to the end: the end that leads to a cross and the end of Jesus' earthly ministry.

Our perspective has changed, and with that change comes a shift in how we approach the way we live our life of faith, in this moment. With this new perspective comes a new way to walk this path of Lenten faith.

I would like to share with you a poem by Ann Weems. It is called "The Walk".

Those of us who walk along the road
do so reluctantly.
Lent is not our favorite time of year.

We'd rather be more active –
 planning and scurrying around.
 All this is too contemplative to suit us.
 Besides we don't know what to do
 with piousness and prayer.

Perhaps we're afraid to have time to think,
 for thoughts come unbidden.
 Perhaps we're afraid to face our future
 knowing our past.
 Give us the courage, O God,
 to hear your word
 and to read our living into it.
 Give us the trust to know we're forgiven,
 and give us the faith
 to take up our lives and walk. ¹

The way we walk this Lenten path needs to be different than the way we walk the rest of our days. The way we think about our faith during this Lenten season needs to shift from the way we contemplate the days of our lives all the rest of the year. We need to allow ourselves to see the view from this walk to Jerusalem. Our very way of looking at the world must shift, if even just for a little while.

But how does the road to Jerusalem differ from that road away from Bethlehem? The road away from Bethlehem shared a vista that held new life rising up on every side. As Jesus walked the road, people would reach out to touch him and find themselves healed. Those who were lame could walk. Those who were blind could see. Those who were mute could shout for joy that theirs was a life renewed and regenerated. The rest of their days would be whole.

But this road to Jerusalem, while still sharing all of these miracles, seems to take on a new intention. There is less a sense of adventure and more a sense of solemn purpose. We are no longer walking the road dreaming of what wonders might lie around the next bend... Now we walk forward, slowly, knowing that what comes next is so difficult, maybe even too difficult to contemplate ... But we also continue to walk forward with the hope and the knowledge that this road will not end at the cross. It will pause. It will ask that we stay awhile and rest and pray, but it also holds the promise that, if we are faithful on the journey *to* the cross, we will also be led along a new road that leads *beyond* the cross.

During this Lenten season, we are asked to look at the road we are on through new eyes. We are asked to listen to Scripture that seems so very familiar, but listening with a new ear. We are expected to allow ourselves to wind down and ponder each moment, accept each experience, allow each movement along this road to bring new meaning to us – not what is promised for this very minute but that which is promised for our eternity.

We are invited to open our eyes that we might see God with new insight. We are invited to open our ears that we might hear God's voice whispering a new and unexpected thing. We

¹ Weems, Ann. *Kneeling in Jerusalem*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992, p 21.

are being told that we must open our hearts that God might purify them, renew them and save them through the very walk that we make with Jesus on the road to Jerusalem.

I would like to close with one more poem: "Winding Down"

We run around the world and church
like wound-up toys,
looking for a way to get to Easter
without reading the instructions.
When we wind down,
we lie on the floor
on our faces,
unable to move.
Perhaps, in the still and the silence,
God will give us the courage
to see our souls
and give us the chance
once more
to choose Life:
faith, rather than frenzy. ²

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Welcome to Lent. I pray that you will choose Life: faith, rather than frenzy...

² Weems, p46.