

Sermon

Last Epiphany C March 2, 2025

Luke 9:28-43

One of the things we know about God is that God is unknowable completely. We can describe who and what God is positively: as in, God is love or God is sacrificial or God is creative. We can also describe who and what God is negatively: as in, God is not hateful or God is not selfish or God is not destructive. We cannot know God completely, but being willing to live with and into God's mystery is an important spiritual step.

Today is the Last Sunday after the Epiphany. It is the last Sunday of the season of manifestation and revelation. Like on the First Sunday after the Epiphany when Jesus was baptized and a voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased," today we again hear a voice from heaven stating, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him." Both of these events help us to see into the mystery of who Jesus is.

On that first Sunday, Jesus is found praying after his baptism. What he's praying about we don't know, but we can probably guess it has something to do with his upcoming ministry. At that point he is confirmed as God's Son and then guided/led/driven out into the wilderness and his encounter with the devil. On this last Sunday we have a parallel event. Once again a voice comes after Jesus was praying. This time, however, the voice is directed at his disciples: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him." On the first Sunday, Jesus receives heavenly confirmation for his ministry. On the last Sunday, he receives confirmation of his Passion.

Immediately before today's incident, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" This led to Jesus' first Passion prediction and the mandate to take up our crosses. This is the "Eight days after these sayings" that your bulletin references but, for some reason, weren't included in the gospel reading.

Those eight days Luke references are significant, not the least of which is because Sunday is often referred to as "the eighth day." As in, after the six days of creation and day of rest, Jesus was resurrected on "the eighth day," a day of new creation.

The two people with Jesus, Moses and Elijah, have a two-fold purpose. First, it recognizes that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. They were speaking of Jesus' departure, or his exodus – a powerful image for the early Jewish followers of Jesus. Second, these two men at this Transfiguration event foreshadow the two men at the tomb (another transfiguration of sorts) and the two men who meet the disciples after Jesus ascends to heaven.

Finally we have the cloud that overshadowed them and from where the voice came. It was a cloud that overshadowed Mt. Sinai with the glory of the Lord and in which Moses received the Law. It was a cloud that lifted Jesus to heaven 40 days after his resurrection. And it was the Holy Spirit that overshadowed Mary, allowing her to conceive the Holy Child. Luke's reference to a cloud is there to remind us of God's presence from the time of Moses to the Ascension and beyond.

On the First Sunday after the Epiphany, we hear the voice from heaven confirming Jesus as God's Son. Today, the Last Sunday after the Epiphany, we hear a voice from heaven telling us to listen to him.

As I said, this directive to listen to him comes after his first Passion prediction. This is no accident. When Jesus tells us that the way to life is through death and the cross, we can't discount that. We need to listen to him.

The way to life isn't through riches. It's not through the heretical prosperity gospel. It's not through focusing on ourselves. The way to life is through sacrifice. It's through the death of selfish desires. It's through lifting up those who are lowly. It's through loving the outcast, foreigner, and those whom society would throw away. It's through listening and acting on the words of Christ.

Throughout the Season of Epiphany we have seen instances of Christ's revelation and manifestation. From the star and wisemen to his baptism and signs and wonders, we have been given a glimpse of who Jesus really is – the Son of God, Savior of the world. But there's only so much we can take in.

Ultimately we must acknowledge that God is only partially knowable. We catch glimpses here and there, but we know only in part, so we must come to terms with living into the mystery. On this Last Sunday after the Epiphany we can glimpse that mystery if we pay attention.

We saw the mystery of Jesus as Son of God at his baptism. We saw the mystery of miraculous signs at the wedding in Cana and on Lake Gennesaret. We are overshadowed by the mysterious cloud of God's presence. And we live with the mystery that the path to life is through death and sacrifice.

May we, like the disciples on the mountain eventually did, find the courage to proclaim and live into the sacrificial mystery of God.

Amen.