

Last Sunday After Epiphany:
Christ the King
St. Mark 9:2-9
February 11, 2018
St. George's Episcopal Church
Fr. Chris

The Cloud

"Then a cloud overshadowed them and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my son, the Beloved, listen to Him!'"

One translation says that the cloud "enveloped" them. It must have been like the pea soup thick fog we had several mornings this past week.

When our perception is limited, we strain carefully to see and hear what is going on around us. We are afraid when we are completely enveloped by a fog or a cloud during a hike on a mountain. We can hardly see where we are going, even if we thought we knew the way. And the fog makes most of us drive slower on the road. It can be scary

Imagine these men on the mountaintop with Jesus, in the middle of a very powerful spiritual experience, and then a cloud rolls in and covers them and Jesus and Moses and Elijah. It was already both an exciting and fearsome experience. The Gospel of Mark notes that "they were terrified." Now a cloud enshrouds them and they can no longer see anything but the mist around them.

Life can close in on us like that. It can get so busy that the busyness enshrouds us in a cloud of unknowing. We move ahead by merely plodding along, doing in the next instant what we did in the last, almost like a cog in a machine. One day folds into another, one week into another and before you know it, it is spring, and the next thing, you wake up and it is summer. And then you start counting down the days until Christmass and another year passes and you start all over again. 'Where did that time go? Boy, that week, that year, just went by so fast!' However, we may not feel that way on Monday morning, when the week ahead looks more like a month of days. But it is not really starting anew, it is a continuation; it is simply repeating what you have been doing until the fog you find yourself in blots out the real you and you can no longer see your real life for the mist of busyness surrounding you.

Then there is the still small voice of God, if you listen carefully, speaking to you in the midst of the mist: 'Jesus is my Beloved: listen to Him!' And if you hear the voice of God in your ears, speaking to your heart mind and soul, and then all of a sudden the mist disappears, and there is only you and there is your God, standing alone with you in the wilderness. And there is comfort in knowing God is there...

What do you do now? How do you listen to Jesus? How do I better listen to what God is saying to me? How should I respond?

The ordinary changes into extraordinary. The person who I came across is another Jesus, an alter Christus, challenging me to change my life, challenging me to change my thinking, challenging me to change my loving from seeking to be loved to becoming a lover of others. Time for some transformation. Can this unholy person, this sinner, change and become holy and humble? Can I, who have wanted and needed so much love, find the strength and resources to start loving others?

Jesus was changed before their eyes. No longer did they see him as another human being, but now, glowing brightly before them, His divinity showed through. A spark of that divinity is in everyone...has the mist moved away enough for you to catch a glimpse of it in your neighbor? And just who is my neighbor?

In my last church they used a lot of incense during the service, so much so, that it could get pretty cloudy in the small church from all the fragrant smoke. The incense gave an aura of mystery to the place, and it was said that it represented our prayers rising up to God and then the Holy Spirit coming upon us. I can't help but think of that image this morning as we talk of a cloud enveloping the disciples on the mountaintop.

So how do we respond to such a mountaintop experience? What happens when the mist starts to disappear and we are left with a new clarity about who we are and whose we are and why we are here. A voice from heaven inside us proclaims, "You are my beloved!" "You are so special!" "You are so loved!"

The mist is not unlike a veil held or worn in front of our eyes, either by our own choice or the will of others, or just as a matter of course by the lifestyle we have chosen. The words of St. Paul today bring clarity to this observation to a sharp point: "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." [2 Corinthians 4:3-4]

This new clarity is too easily lost as we climb down from the mountaintop experience. It is easy to get lost again in the dense fog in the valley below. But now we have a light to guide us. Now we feel the love of the God who calls us God's beloved. Now we have a headlamp to wear to guide us through the mists and clouds and fog of daily life.

They climbed up the mountain to see their friend and mentor turn into million-lumen light, so bright it was hard to look into it without being blinded. This is the light God gives to the world, a beacon to guide us out of the darkness, the clouds, the fog and the mist, to find why we are here and for whom we are here. This is the headlamp we are given to wear in exchange for that veil.

Again Paul speaks in the same excerpt from Second Corinthians: "For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." [2 Corinthians 4:6]

In response I am reminded of the old offertory sentence from the Book of Common Prayer: Let you light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to God!

This Sunday is called transfiguration Sunday. We look into the familiar and allow it to be transfigured before our eyes. The blessing of faith is that the ordinary can be transformed and transfigured before our eyes also in the extraordinary. Lent is bookended between this mountaintop Sunday portending change in our lives and Easter Sunday, the harbinger of hope for us and our future. Transfiguration Sunday is a way of looking into the future through the fog and the mists of time, to see the light of Christ held out to us at the end of this long tunnel. Today, we get a brief glimpse of the truth and what is to come.

AMEN