

Last Sunday of Epiphany: The Transfiguration  
St. Matthew 17:1-9  
February 23rd, 2020  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
Fr. Chris

## Humble God

“As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, ‘Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.’”

What’s the big secret Jesus? Why not do in the words of the Christmas spiritual, “Go tell it on the mountain?” ‘Don’t tell anybody what you saw until after Easter, when I rise from the dead. I want to win the hearts of my people by who I am, not with any flashy special effects or others telling them to follow me. No flashy rumors! Please!’

What’s the big secret? Our God is a humble God. This is the same God who became one of us just about two months ago. No armies. No newspaper ads. No TV spots. No special effects. No chariots. No Big Deal. God arrived quietly, in a back-water town, almost unnoticed and then quietly slipped into the midst of the people of Israel for the next 30 years, until he came out in his Baptism in the Jordan River.

When he healed the sick, he didn’t ask for the credit, he would tell those who were healed to go to the priests and give thanks for their healing. Do not tell anyone! Keep it a secret! He would say, for example: (and there are many in the Gospels-just Google them, but here are a couple of them that stood out to me to share with you)

In Matthew 8:3-4:

“... After he asked the man if he wanted to be healed, Jesus reached out and touched him. ‘I do want to,’ he answered Jesus. ‘Be clean!’ At once the man was healed of his disease. Then Jesus said to him, ‘Listen! Don’t tell anyone, but go straight to the priest and let him examine you; then in order to prove to everyone that you are cured, offer the sacrifice that Moses ordered.’”

And again in Mark 5:42-43: [This is the story here Jesus was told in advance that the little girl was dead, so many wondered, what was the point of his visit?] “She got up at once and started walking around. (She was twelve years old.) When this happened, they were completely amazed. But Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone, and he said, “Give her something to eat.”

The works which Jesus did in healing people weren’t meant for flash or to impress people with His power. They were meant to show the compassion and understanding of God. They were meant to give us hope that God hears our prayers and is doing greater things for us than we could desire or pray for, to quote the collect from the Prayerbook: [P. 831: -Prayer 54. For those we Love Almighty God, we entrust all who are dear to us to your never-failing care and love, for this life and the life to come, knowing that you are

doing for them better things than we can desire or pray for; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.]

But we know that flash sells. The big splash attracts attention. We figure that impressing other people with our superiority and prowess will help us succeed in our mission. But what mission? What was the mission of God in coming to this earth, do you think? What was God's mission in walking among us?

Wouldn't impressing people have been better and a more effective way of getting out the message of God? Why not do that God? Your handlers have it all wrong! Didn't God know what God was doing? Look at how successful the Wizard of Oz was with the flashing lights and special effects, impressing people, instead of the small man behind the curtain! But if God's way of emphasizing the words and deeds of Jesus, did not work, then why are we here? If God had instead made a big deal about it trying to impress us with what a great and powerful God God is, do you really think that would have worked? Isn't that what the people of Israel thought about God after their experiences in the "Old Testament?" And yet His quiet, humble ministry has existed for centuries, right down to this morning and in this small, humble church of St. George's. Obviously word and deeds were more authentic and revealing about God and won the day and the hearts of those who follow Jesus, even today.

Our God is a real God, not a wizard in a book or movie. Our God is a humble God. You have mountaintop experiences as a gift from God, but then you must go back to daily living. You cannot build booths on the mountaintop and enshrine the experience. You cannot grasp and hold on to the experience. You have to let it go and move on. We will not only meet God on the mountaintop, we will also stumble into God when we are going about our daily lives, driving in the car, doing the dishes, taking out the trash, cleaning the house, maybe even in the midst of our job while we are at work. The mountain rises there also.

What's the big secret?

We may want the approval and acceptance of others, but getting that is not the same as receiving their love. People may be impressed with you, but that doesn't say anything about your relationship with them. The relationship comes from interactions with another. It is forged in words shared and deeds given and done. Things which impress, make me better than you. That does not bring us together. That sets me apart, and that is a lonely place to be. Words and actions of empathy and understanding do bring people together.

The most effective fantasy romances on the Hallmark Channel movie Rom-Coms are about princes and princesses who meet common ordinary people in the United States and then fall in love. Why does that work, do you think? Because they keep the secret about their royal titles until after they fall in love with the common person. There's the big secret! They don't attract them by impressing them with titles and flash and splash. No, they attract their partners in word and deed, so that their partners will love them for who they really are, and not for their titles and station in life. That's the reason for the secret. Who we are is always more important than what we do, though in our culture, if I

ask you to introduce yourself and tell me a little about who you are, the answer will likely be about what your job is and what you do. Hi, I'm Fr. Chris, and I am an Episcopal Priest and I work at St George's. That says very little about who I really am.

The same is true with God. Our God need not impress anyone. God wants us to love God for who God is, not merely because God is God. That sounds more complicated than it is. God wants our authentic love, not because of miracles, flashes and splashes. That's all nice, but real relationships begin with mutual trust, respect, affection, and words and deeds that express, reflect and enhance those deep-seated experiences of human attraction.

And it isn't about who we were. Relationships are about the present: who we are. We all may harbor impressive secrets from our past. But those secrets gain us little in the present.

Jesus didn't want people running around announcing he is the Messiah. Jesus wanted folks to figure out who God is, without titles, thunder and lightning, and whatever other impressive things He could have done. Remember the words in the Gospel of Matthew [16:20]: 'Then Jesus ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.' Our God is a humble God who is perfect as God is. God does not need to impress anyone to convince them to love him, because impressing people does not foster real love.

This is the humble God who faced the most shameful and painful death possible, to show God understands suffering.

This is the humble God who cried when his friend Lazarus died, as it is recorded in the scripture in the shortest sentence in the Bible: "Jesus wept."

This is the humble God who did not want to be carried into Jerusalem in a sedan chair being lifted up on the shoulders of his followers, as any wealthy or political figure might have done in his day. No, he chose a humble donkey, the mode of transportation of the poor. No red carpet, just a few palm branches thrown in the road and the cloaks of a few of his followers and common people who were cash poor but rich in the spirit of being with God. The honor is yielded up by other humble people to whom he came to minister and give hope, because those who were proud were too closed-minded to hear His message or to try and understand who God really is, instead of whom they wanted God to be, much like themselves. Except, in that regard, God isn't proud. Our God is a humble God. God needs no pretenses.

So today Jesus is changed before the eyes of the inner circle [Peter, James and John] of his disciples on the mountaintop. He appears to them totally transformed into a holy, super-natural person that he is: his divine nature is exposed for them to see. Though the experience is brief, it is transformative for these three followers. This week we now enter the climb to the mountaintop of Easter morning as we begin the Season of Lent on Wednesday.

I hope that in our prayers and meditations this Lent, we too will have a chance for a brief encounter with the Holy One. Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek and ye shall find." Pray that God will open your hearts and your eyes to see God at work around you and in your life.

And now it's time to tell the secret. It is exposed for all to see! AMEN