

Matthew 17:1-8

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

Bibles have come to us following many centuries of care in the hands of many, many people of faith covering many, many centuries. Original manuscripts written on scrolls and copied and copied. Some changes along the way. In the early years of the Christian faith, scrolls were collected and compared and translations made of the scrolls. Then as language changed, updates of the scriptures made. By the fourth century, paragraphs began to be numbered. By the thirteenth century, the chapter and numbers we find in our Bibles were put in place and standardized. Then we preachers tended to preach from passages of scripture which fit within the framework of those chapters. Take out all the chapter and verse numberings, one might read through from one thought to the next without separating the thoughts. A few days ago, Leisa pointed out to me how that tends to happen with the scripture we just read. The Transfiguration. We usually begin reading at verse 1. The paragraph, and more specifically the sentence just prior to it is often read within a different context. But what if the chapter and verse numbers which were inserted eight hundred years ago were left out, and we carried the immediately preceding sentence into this story of the Transfiguration? We

read the first words again: ²⁸Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” ¹Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ²And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Hmmmm. Interesting. But that is just an aside thought.

The main thought is this. Three disciples accompanied Jesus up the mountain. Something amazing happened with those three disciples, Peter, James, and John. Something amazing. One would think that they would be forever changed by the experience. More than just a vision. Something mysterious. Something mystical. Something powerful. But yet, in the not too distant future, those same three accompanied Jesus to the Garden of Gethsemani as Jesus prayed before his crucifixion. They slept. Jesus, alone.

The Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky is a Trappist Monastery. Monks dedicated to a life of prayer and work and silence. The Abbey, founded in Western Kentucky over 150 years ago covers many acres of rolling hills – some farmland, some forested. On retreat, in the silence, there are many paths through the woods and over the hills that one can spend an afternoon walking. Way up on a hill are several bronze statues. As one walks up the path, one turns a corner on the path and encounters life size statues of Peter, James, and John, sleeping. On up the path is another life size bronze statue of Jesus in prayer. The obvious message for the monks (as well as for all those on retreat there) is to pray with Jesus.

At three in the morning the large bell of the abbey rings for about one minute. The bell rings with significant volume, but it is a big mellow sounding bell which gracefully pulls the dreamer out of the dream world. The monks who spend much of the day in silence get up, and wearing their white choir robes, silently gather in the sanctuary for vigils. When the monks have gathered, one of the monks knocks one time on wood – they all cross themselves. The cantor then leads them in singing:

O Lord, open my lips.
And my mouth shall declare your praise.

Their very first words of the day are from Psalm 51: "O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall declare your praise." Seven more times during the day they will gather to sing the Psalms – all 150 Psalms every two weeks – to pray, to hear scripture read, to hear the words of spiritual writers, to sing hymns, to bow as they sing a doxology after every Psalm.

You certainly remember back several years to the winter when there were a number of snowmachine fatalities – mostly due to avalanches. The big avalanche south of Girdwood where people with powerful snowmachines were highmarking – heading up to the peaks of the mountains or the ridges at some amazing levels of steepness. But the snow pack under them was not stable, and when the snow let loose, the avalanche began and swept the snowmachiners down the slopes with it and killed many of them. As usual, whenever there is a tragedy of some sort, we are offered a tremendous amount of investigative reporting and commentary from the news organizations. I watched and heard and read many reports and articles about avalanches that spring, but one stuck with me. It was an interview with an avalanche expert. He was asked how one can determine if the snow pack is stable or if it is dangerous. He was saying

that one of the best ways is by listening. If you hear a "whump" sound, that means to get off of the mountain. The "whump" sound from deep in the snow is telling you about the lack of stability of the snow pack. But, the problem is is that snowmachines can be very loud, and someone on a snowmachine is not prone to sit still with the motor off, quietly listening. People who like to play on snowmachines prefer to be moving at some amazing speeds up and down the slopes with their engines usually on, but there could be a message that would save their lives if they would just stop and be still in the quietness for a while.

Perhaps that can be as an allegory for our spiritual lives. Busy, busy, busy. That is how we sometimes can get. Like the snowmachiners who are playing hard on the slopes of the mountains. But there might be a message for us which is very important for us to hear – a message which could save our souls – should we stop for a moment here and there through our days and quietly listen. As we pray. As we read a few verses from the Bible. "Be still and know that I am God." "Be still and know that I Am." "Be still and know." "Be still." "Be."

And, by the way, the root meaning of the word "accompaniment" is "to break bread together." Today we ordain and install our new elders and deacons. Today we celebrate holy communion. Amen.