

Last Epiphany, Year B
Mark 9: 2-9
February 22, 2009

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, CA

Food for the Journey:
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

What an odd story—this story we just heard. It leaves me wondering. How did Jesus get them to go with him? What was the attraction? We're they curious about his forays off alone? Or were their ego's stroked by his invitation to come away with him? Maybe it was something far more powerful than that—a deep desire just to be with Jesus. I wonder.

And I wonder about their hike as well. Mark tells us that Jesus leads Peter, James and John up a high mountain, by themselves. Was Jesus far in the lead? Did the three disciples straggle behind or struggle to keep up? Do you think they engaged in conversation or did they walk quietly each absorbed in his own thoughts? I wonder if they chewed on the teachings they'd just heard—teachings that there were some who would not taste death before they saw the Kingdom of God or were they thinking back to Jesus' hard conversation about the cross and crucifixion. Remember that one—Jesus tells them about his own death and then says to crowd, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." What were Peter, James and John expecting as they clambered up that mountain—the Cross or the Kingdom?

How do you suppose they felt as they approached that mountain top. Were they afraid? Hopeful? Confused? Maybe all that and more.

Weary from the hike, they lie down and take a snooze. Maybe one hears a pebble roll down the hill. Or maybe fragments of a conversation rouse them from their sleep. Suddenly, before their very eyes, they see Jesus glowing with the full light of the divine and engaged in conversation with Moses and with Elijah. What a moment. What a sight. In that moment confusion, fear, and awe collide. No wonder Peter wants to build some booths; no wonder Peter wants to erect some dwellings; no wonder Peter wants to preserve the moment. Walling out or walling in the awesome power of the moment. Yet something there is that doesn't like a wall.

God's voice breaks in saying, "This is my son, the beloved. Listen to him." Immediately, in a flash, in a nanosecond, they get up and follow Jesus down the mountain and into the midst of the messiness of life. They didn't even take time to process what happened on that mountain. In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, they were back to the crowds pressing on Jesus, crowds calling for his healing touch, crowds needing his loving care, crowds craving his deep peace.

I wonder—could it be that that mountaintop moment was meant to be only a moment—something to sustain them on their way to the Cross, something to remind them of the Kingdom? Food for the journey ahead.

We, too, have mountaintop experiences; moments when we are keenly aware that we are in the presence of God; we, too, have moments when we know beyond all reason that God is present in this world, our world--God's world. Present in the moment.

--moments in prayer when all thought of self drops away and there remains only the still quiet of God;

--moments driving down the road as we catch the light on the red vines or the golden mustard

-- fleeting moments when fear and anxiety subside and we are left with a sense of assurance that we can face the future--whatever it brings.

Ed Bacon, the rector of All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, calls such moments “glory attacks” which he describes as experiences of beauty or soul or spirit or truth or release--moments that you simply know that the glory of God has entered your life.”

Our mountain top experiences, our glory attacks, give us a foretaste of God's kingdom and keep us going. Like the bread and wine, they are food for the journey. They sustain us when times get tough. A way station, not a destination.

You see, we can't stay up there; we are a people of the road. Like Peter, John, and James, we are called to get up, to move on, to walk into the midst and messiness of life. We have work to do—important work. We are called to join with Jesus in the healing of the world—bringing food to the hungry, release to the captives, and good news to the poor. That's our work. That's our mission. Every day of our lives. Bringing the deep peace of God to those who know no peace.

Let's get on with our work. God's Kingdom awaits.