

**A Sermon Preached
at
St. George's Madrid
by
The Reverend Canon John W. Kilgore, M.D.
23 February 2020
Last Sunday before Lent
Exodus 24: 12-18
Psalm 2 or 99
2 Peter 1: 16-21
Matthew 17: 1-9**

Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.

Tell no one... Obviously they did, here we are two thousand years later. Apparently they did it later, as instructed. But I wonder what it was like for them at the time... Think about it, Jesus takes Peter and James and John and leads them up a high mountain by themselves and his face shines like the sun and his clothes become dazzling white. They must have been terrified. You know Jesus put these guys through a lot. We know the end of the story but they didn't have that advantage. They were living it forward. And must have been confused. Voices booming from heaven, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' And Jesus telling them, 'Don't tell any one about it!.....' Really? This crazy thing happened and we are to keep our mouths shut?!

This story of the event called The Transfiguration is appointed in our calendar for the last Sunday before Lent every year. Ash Wednesday is this week. The theologians point out that the Transfiguration is 'a dramatic event that recalls his Baptism and anticipates his Resurrection...' and that the appearance of 'Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the prophet, confirm [ing] that Jesus fulfilled both the law and the prophets.' A theological, rational, 'considered' way to make sense of this event. But I wonder if the apostles, if Peter and James and John, were sitting around discussing the theological significance of the event. Or were they more baffled? For actually, they were, I suggest, in their discipleship, more like children following as best they could what they were told. But probably finding it a bit difficult to understand as they played it forward, lived into it.

And I think there is a lesson there. Jesus talked a lot about children and related to them very much. Children's candor and freshness and honesty are inspirational for us. The stories of such are legendary. Consider little Johnny who stayed home from church on Palm Sunday. When his parents and siblings returned home carrying palm branches he asked them what they were for. 'People held them over Jesus' head as he walked by' his older sister informed him. 'Wouldn't you know it,' the boy fumed. 'The one Sunday I don't go to church and He shows up!' Or the little girl who, when asked by the Sunday school teacher to write a letter to God wrote, 'Dear God, We had a good time in church today. Wish you could have been there.'

Or kids' understanding of scripture. The Lord's Prayer has been recited as 'Our Father who does art in heaven, Harold be thy name, thy kingdom come, I will be done with dressings made in heaven. Give us our jelly bread and forgive us our trash baskets.' Or 'Our Father, who art in heaven, how didja know my name.' Then there was the little girl who misunderstood, and thought she was praying for her little sister to get into trouble. For she thought it said, and prayed 'lead a snot into temptation.' And the kid who misunderstood the creed, '...He suffered under a bunch of violets!...' instead of Pontius Pilate.

I well remember as a young lad reading the sign at a local crosswalk that said, 'Yield to Pedestrians' and I asked my mother why Presbyterians were special there. We were Disciples of Christ, not Presbyterian. Could we use the crosswalk?

Or Jason who was crying in the back seat of the car on the way home from church after the christening of his baby sister. His father asked three times what was wrong. Jason finally replied, 'That priest said he wanted us brought up in a good Christian home, and I wanted to stay with you guys!'

And the very clear understanding of the kid in Sunday School class. The teacher said, 'If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church...would that get me into heaven?' 'No!' the children all answered. 'If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into Heaven?' Again, the answer was 'No!' 'Well then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children, and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?' Again, 'No!' 'Well then, how can I get into heaven?' the teacher queried. A voice from the back of the room shouted, 'YOU GOTTA BE DEAD!'

And one of my favourites: The pastor noticed little Mary staring at the large plaque in the foyer of the church. It was covered with names, and small patriotic flags were mounted on either side of it. The seven year old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up, stood beside her and said quietly, 'Good morning, Mary.' 'Good morning,' replied the young girl, still focused on the plaque, and then asked, 'What is this?' 'Well, dear, it's a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service.' Soberly, they stood together, staring at the large plaque. Her voice was trembling and barely audible when she asked, 'Which service, the 830, the 1000 o'clock or the 1130?'

And there was the little girl who became restless as the sermon dragged. Finally she leaned over to her mother and whispered, 'Mommy, if we give him the money now will he let us go?' And speaking of sermons there was the preacher's kid who was watching his father write a sermon and asked, 'How do you know what to say?' The father replied, 'Why, God tells me.' And the kid responded 'Oh, then why do you keep crossing things out?' Or the little girl who noticed that her priest father always paused and bowed his head for a moment before starting his sermon, and then asked him, why. He responded, 'Well honey, I'm asking the Lord to help me preach a good sermon.' 'Well then, how come He doesn't do it?' she queried. And then there was the mother who was giving instruction to her three children as she sent them into Sunday school, 'And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?' Her son quickly responded, 'Because people are sleeping!'

We adults aren't immune, either. There is the story of the gentleman who, about to settle in for a long sermon by a priest known for his lengthy sermons, got up and left during the middle of the message and returned before the conclusion. When the priest asked him where he had gone,

he replied, 'I went to get a haircut.' 'But,' said the priest, 'why didn't you do that before the service?' 'Because,' the gentleman replied, 'I didn't know I was going to need one then.'

We adults can also be rote in our responses and not listen. Truly there was an Episcopal Church in Wisconsin wherein a priest had just started the *Sursum Corda* when a woman fainted. The liturgy continued.

Priest: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Priest: Would one of the ushers help that woman?

People: It is meet and right so to do.

And another occasion when the same priest was checking the microphone.

Priest: Something is wrong with this microphone.

People: And also with you!

But illustrating childlike understanding and following, was a child at the altar rail at the cathedral in St. Louis, where everyone, including kids could take communion. I remember I was distributing communion, and a young boy reached out for the wafer and asked his mother, 'What is this?' 'Jesus,' she answered. And he said, 'Can I have some more?' I gave him a second communion wafer.

Can I have some more? Not theology. But the pure love of Christ. We don't need a theological treatise on the Transfiguration. We need to walk as Jesus walked: loving, and giving, and caring. With the pure understanding and intentions that children model so well for us. Didn't Jesus tell us we are to be like little children. Suffer the little children to come unto me. Jesus, and children, loving and simple and genuine. It's about where our heart is. Lent begins this week. May we all adopt spiritual practices that simplify our lives and make us more like the disciples who followed Jesus to the mountain top. And more like little children that want some more Jesus.

"This is my Son, the Beloved...listen to him!"

Amen.