

Last Sunday after the Epiphany
February 14, 2021

First, Happy Valentine's Day!

I ask your prayers this week for each other. Pick out a few people you know in the parish and spend the week with them in your prayers. In this church family, we need to keep in mind that we are a gift and a blessing to each other - so let's hold each other in prayer.

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
And blessed be God's kingdom, now and forever. Amen.

Together:

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Let us now pray together the collect of the day.

O God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

First Lesson

2 Kings 2:1-12

When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent."

Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for the Lord has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today the Lord will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."

Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. Fifty men

of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

The Response

Psalm 50:1-6

Deus deorum

1 The Lord, the God of gods, has spoken;
he has called the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

2 Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty,
God reveals himself in glory.

3 Our God will come and will not keep silence;
before him there is a consuming flame,
and round about him a raging storm.

4 He calls the heavens and the earth from above
to witness the judgment of his people.

5 "Gather before me my loyal followers,
those who have made a covenant with me
and sealed it with sacrifice."

6 Let the heavens declare the rightness of his cause;
for God himself is judge.

The Epistle

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

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. For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. 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.

The Gospel

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Mark.
Glory to you Lord Christ.

Mark 9:2-9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

Praise to you Lord Christ

A Reflection

May the words here written and the prayer of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. *Amen.*

I’m going to take a bit of a liberty this week. This will not be a regular reflection but will be based around the words of my “official” Priest in Charge report as offered at the annual meeting this past week. I wanted to share this, with some mild modifications, (such as removing some of the business section of it), as I have been thinking much in the past week about what a gift and blessing a church family can be to all its participants.

(The meeting itself went quite well – no startling news, just a chance for us to be together and to see each other – all of this thanks to Zoom Meetings – part of the “new normal” we are working with!)

I am finding myself a bit startled when I realize we have been functioning under the conditions of this Pandemic for almost a year now. I can still recall standing with Mike and Karen by the altar after our Sunday service on March 15, 2020, discussing how we were to proceed. I believe we decided to close the following Sunday and see how things unfolded from there.

We have of course missed more than that following Sunday – the list of what we have missed is a bit daunting, and I will not engage that whole list here. We have, needless to say, missed each other.

But we have also gained a few things, too. Gained a sense of our own strength, perhaps. Gained a sense of the strength of our own faith, even. A sense of what is truly important. We have seen that the church is much more than the building – it is also the people.

I have endeavored to provide a written service each Sunday. With a reflection on the readings. I have heard some wonderful stories about families sitting and reading this together and also heard about it being printed and shared with others in the congregation. Where some churches have done some online broadcasting of services, I made the choice to go with what I saw as a more accessible way to share the material. If you have helped share this with others, I thank you.

Trinity has also been present for an assortment of funerals in this recent period of time, with local funeral homes contacting us if someone associated with Trinity had passed on. It was also my sincere pleasure to perform a baptism recently, with requests for prayers being included in the written service.

We also really got away with something in the late Fall – for about 8 weeks, we had Sunday services live and in person. No communion, no sharing of the peace, and no coffee hour but a chance to worship together. Following the recommendation of the Bishop's office, I pulled the plug on this before the holidays, not liking the potential risk, and I look forward to being able to be together again.

Much of my work at Trinity is directed toward the spiritual life of the church, leaving the financial matters in the much more capable hands of folks like Don Firth. It has also not escaped my notice that pledges have continued to come into the church, and I am very grateful for this happening. It is vitally important that this continue, as rentals are off as people are not gathering as often - we've missed the increase in pledging around major holidays, also. If you are able to continue with your pledge, I offer my gratitude on behalf of the church. (Yes, Kim and I are continuing with our pledge, too!) If you are unable to continue, please do not consider this a source of guilt – your prayers, your presence in faith is also a gift that is greatly needed in the world today, and I offer my gratitude for this gift.

Church school is also continuing, with Rachel doing some remarkable work remotely with the kids. Rachel's work, in both the Sunday school and on our online presence, is an important part of who we currently are, and for that we owe her a debt of gratitude. Please thank her next time you see her.

Theater folks have a tradition of leaving a “ghost light” lit when the theater is closed or unoccupied for any length of time. My understanding is that many of the theaters on Broadway have left ghost lights burning as they have left the building. The ghost light is meant to light the way when it is time to return to the building.

In many ways I have come to consider our sanctuary lamp to be our ghost light, shining as bright as the light in our hearts – shining as bright as our faith. The ghost light is lit with the knowledge that we will return, and we can then see the way. The lit sanctuary lamp is meant to signify Christ is present. Let's keep that lamp lit – and do all we can to keep our own lamps lit also.

The Annual Meeting is usually the time to consider what we have accomplished in the last year. On one level, that might not seem like much. But if you look at it more deeply, we have accomplished much – just because we are still here. The storm has raged, but we still stand – we may stand a bit shaken, but we stand.

In considering the goals for the coming year, I wish one of my own goals could be to produce a magic wand and make all of this all better – but I can't. So my goal will continue to be attending a crazy number of Zoom meetings, reading an ever growing number of emails, making and receiving a large number of phone calls, and doing all that I can to make sure we stay standing. Perhaps a bit shaken, but we will do it together. I hope you will join me in this goal. This is, in all that it contains, clearly not the time to make bold, innovative moves in church. Let's take care of each other.

I have mentioned a few individuals in this, but let's be very clear – in this turbulent time, I am very thankful for the works you all are doing. It may be for the church, it may be for your individual jobs, it may be for your family – and, some days, the hardest part of that work may be just the act of getting up and facing another day, but you are doing it – and that is quite frankly impressive. (Take a moment to pat yourself on the back!)

I believe that as Christians, what we do, we do in faith. I often offer a small prayer before I leave the house in the morning, just to thank the Lord for walking with me for another day, and yes, some days it is a rough walk.

But if I keep my eyes open, and pay attention, I find I can spot the blessings that are out there. (Some days they are a bit more hidden than others, but I promise you, they are there!)

At the end of today's Gospel reading, Jesus orders the disciples to "tell no one about what they had seen." In the reading from 2 Kings, Elisha offers multiple times to "be silent." Yet in some contrast Corinthians offers "For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness."

So now let's together, let our light shine. Perhaps remembering the ghost light in the church. But let's not feel we need to use words to do it. How about if our actions become the light? How about if we let the light shine in how we treat each other? Let's have the light shine in the way we care for and help each other? Of course, use words, if you want to – but sometimes words can get in the way of the heart. So act from the heart and carry that love forward into the world.

With all this talk of love, let me also wish you the happiest of Valentine's Day. Find a way to share your love with someone today.

Amen.

Let us now confess our sins against God and our neighbor, praying together:

*Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;*

*that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.*

Let us end by praying as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us. Pray this as you will, out loud or to yourself – just know that God hears you.

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

The prayer of Spiritual Communion this week is one I heard at the monastery of Society of Saint John the Evangelist (I recently discovered they offer services online). This prayer is from apartheid era South Africa. In that time many prisoners were denied the sacraments and had to find other ways of taking Communion. This found its way into the 1989 Anglican Church of Southern Africa Prayer Book as a help to others who could not receive.

Jesus, may all that is you flow into me. May your body and blood be my food and drink. May your passion and death be my strength and life. Jesus, with you by my side enough has been given. May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross. Let me not run from the love which you offer but hold me safe from the forces of evil. On each of my dyings shed your light and your love. Keep calling to me until that day comes when, with your saints, I may praise you forever. Amen.

Look for another email from the church on Wednesday, and we celebrate and honor the occasion of Ash Wednesday. It is unfortunate that we cannot be together on that day for the traditional imposing of ashes for the beginning of Lent – but I will share the appropriate readings for the day, and invite you into contemplation of this period.

And remember Life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those we travel with. So be swift to love – make haste to be kind – and now go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Yours in Christ,
Dave+