

ST. MARGARET OF SCOTLAND ANGLICAN CHURCH

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Sunday, February 14, 2021 Epiphany Six

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SUNDAY FEBRUARY 14, 2021
Epiphany Six Morning Prayer

10:00 a.m.

THE GATHERING OF THE COMMUNITY

Officiant: Lord, open our lips,

People: And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Officiant: O God, make speed to save us.

People: O Lord, make haste to help us. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

All: Alleluia!

*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us:
O come, let us worship.*

Venite

Psalm 95.1-7

Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and raise a loud shout to him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods. In his hand are the caverns of the earth, and the heights of the hills are his also. The sea is his for he made it, and his hands have moulded the dry land. Come, let us bow down, and bend the knee, and kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand. Oh, that today you would hearken to his voice!

The Psalms

Psalm: 50:1-6

The mighty one, God the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.

Our God comes and does not keep silence, before him is a devouring fire, and a mighty tempest all around him.

He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people: "Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!"

The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge. Selah

People: Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now and will be for ever. Amen.

The Proclamation of the Word

A READING FROM THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS (2 Kings 2:1-12)

Now 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 word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

A READING FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-6

And 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 word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE HOLY GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO MARK (9:2-9)

People: Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Six days later, 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.

The Gospel of Christ.

People: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SERMON

Heavenly encounters for earthly good

Elijah and Elisha are the Batman and Robin figures of the Old Testament. Elijah is the big prophet who defines the prophetic tradition in Hebrew thought. He is the "go to the guy" when we want to grapple with how God equips and uses people as prophetic figures. He is bold, forthright and full of gumption for God. He takes on the bad guys – primarily the dysfunctional kings of Israel - and shows them up for what they are.

Elisha is the side-kick – the little guy who follows and learns and get's a sense of what is possible by watching the true master at work. Wherever he and Elijah go he is recognized in the subordinate relation – they even refer to Elijah as "your master" and Elisha is so taken by Elijah that he refuses to let him out of his sight.

Elisha was a farm boy who attended cattle. One day he was out plowing a field with twelve oxen (the super John Deere of his day) and Elijah walks up to him and throws his cloak across his shoulders as a sign of his calling. Now Elisha was not short on commitment – he asks Elijah if he can go home and say farewell to his family. In the process he burns his plough, slaughters his team of oxen, cooks all the meat and gives it away. As a reward he becomes this wandering prophet's "attendant" and follows Elijah for the reign of two kings – the remainder of the rule of King Ahab and the very short rule of King Ahaziah.

We are suddenly aware that God is going to take Elijah up to heaven. Elijah indicates to Elisha that he is to stay in Gilgal, while Elijah goes to Bethel to say good-bye to the school of prophets there, but Elisha insists on following. While in Bethel the prophets tell Elisha what is going to happen. Then they go through the same thing a second time when Elijah tells Elisha to stay in Bethel while he goes to Jericho. Again, Elisha refuses to leave Elijah's side. Again, the school of the prophets in Jericho tell Elisha what is happening. Finally, Elijah tells Elisha to stay in Jericho while he goes on to the River Jordan, but Elisha refuses to leave him. When they get to the river there are 50 prophets watching them, Elijah takes his cloak, strikes the river and they cross.

When they get to the other side of the river Elijah asks Elisha what he can give him before he is taken away. Elisha asks for a double portion of Elijah's spirit or prophetic gifting. Now neither men have children and traditionally the first born son would get a double portion of his father's inheritance. Obviously, Elijah and Elisha are a little skimp on personal belongings, but Elisha has given up everything in order to learn from Elijah. The difficulty is that Elijah knows that the prophetic gift he has is not his to give but is God's to give.

We then have this amazing encounter with a chariot and horses that separate Elijah and Elisha. It is obvious that Elisha is grieved at the loss of this father figure – he calls out to Elijah and rips his clothing in mourning.

The next time we encounter Elijah is in the story of the transfiguration. In Mark's account of it we are told that Peter, James and John go with Jesus up a mountain to a secluded place. You might remember in the story from Mark's Gospel last Sunday, Jesus does the same thing and Peter is beside himself with Jesus vanishing.

Obviously, this time he and James and John decide it is better to stick to Jesus like glue than have him wandering off without them.

When on the mountain Jesus is transfigured – like Moses is on Mount Sinai when he encounters God – and he literally shines. Soon he is joined by Elijah and Moses – Old Testament figures representing the two great traditions of the prophetic and the Law. Peter is a little gob-smacked by all of this and thinks proactively. “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here, let us make three dwellings (literally tabernacles), one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” “Yes, Jesus lets capture this moment for all of time, lets keep it as it is and solidify it as this wonderful and unchanging moment. Let’s make sure we never lose this in any way and keep it static for all time.”

Of course, Peter has actually interrupted the encounter mid-way. If he thought this was fantastic, he sure should have waited a while, because then there is the voice from within the cloud, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him.” They all stand there stunned into silence and then - just as suddenly - it is all over and they are just simply left there with Jesus. As they descend the mountain Jesus turns to them and tells them to keep what they have experienced to themselves until after his resurrection – a reference they clearly would not have understood there and then!

What happens if this is actually a story about Elisha being stuck? What happens if Elisha wanted to capture this Kodak moment for all time? What happens if Elisha was so attached to Elijah that he struggled to let go and let God work? What happens if Elisha was so obsessed with Elijah, somebody he had given up everything to follow, that he had got stuck in this “happy place” where he could follow and be led from one adventure to another? What happens if Elisha was so stuck that he was not prepared for the reality that God wanted to use him as a great prophet? What happens if Elijah knew that and recognized that when he was out the way that God would give Elisha everything he could not grant him as a prophet, but God could? What if Elisha was just simply forced to deal with reality and step up to the plate, because he was no longer the side-kick? What would happen if Elisha did not step up to the plate and be everything that God wanted him to be?

We might ask the same question of Peter. What happens if Jesus agrees to capture this moment for all time, to give in to dwelling on a mountain in some transcendent state with Elijah and Moses? What happens if Jesus agrees with Peter’s sense that this is simply the best possible deal and religious experience imaginable? What happens if there is no voice from the cloud affirming who Jesus is, no decent down the mountain and no anticipation of Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday? What happens if it all ends with the transfiguration?

One of the hardest lessons to learn in life is that our happy place is not necessarily the best place we can be or the place where God wants to leave us. One of the hardest lessons to learn is that sometimes the relationships we are in, as good as they are, closet us from being everything we need to be for God and that a little shake up might be in our best interest. That the loss of balance in our lives might be there to move us on or to create an opportunity for us to rethink who we are and the way we engage with the world. That as special as something or somebody might be to us, we may have become stuck. That the little shake up might be a pivotal moment or a vocational challenge.

Elijah being taken up is a pivotal moment for Elisha. Elisha moves from being the side-kick to being the new “super-dude”. As he retrieves Elijah dropped coat, parts the waters of the Jordan and encounters the 50 prophets watching on the Jericho side of the River Jordan he becomes their new master. He is the one who calls the shots. He is the one they look to as the one who will give the lead and the one that God will us as the “new Elijah”. Thankfully Elisha steps up to the plate and – literally – takes on Elijah’s mantle and goes where God commands him to go.

Jesus coming down the mountain of transfiguration is a pivotal point in Mark’s Gospel - the rest of the journey is walked to the crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus takes on his mantle of obedience to bring about true justice,

compassion, mercy and grace. Without that descent from the mountain there is no hope or reconciliation for humanity. In essence, Peter would have preserved his “happy place” at our expense.

I wonder if we can imagine our own disruptive moments differently? Could we ever imagine that when we go through some form of disruptive change when established relationships are challenged or our places of well-being are unsettled that God’s fuller purpose is being achieved? All too often we want things to stay the same or to go back to a “happier time” without realizing what we are asking for. All too often we want to cling onto this moment or these relationships as they are, without realizing that to do so means that we rob ourselves of far more – even if the journey involves some significant suffering or loss in the process.

My hope and prayer for us this week and into the season of Lent that we can see with the eyes of faith all the possibility that God holds for us within the context of change. That in-the-midst of our loss, grieving or desire for things to stay the same or go back to a “happier time” that God would give us those glimpses of a much greater future hope that is possible. That as much as we might to cling to our Elijah’s or stay on our mountain of transfiguration that we would have the courage to cross our Jordan or to descend to our Gethsemanes and our Easter story.

People: Amen

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH - THE APOSTLES’ CREED

All: I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

INTERCESSIONS AND THANKSGIVINGS

Litany 13 Incarnation

Officiant: In joy and humility let us pray to the creator of the universe, saying, “Lord, grant us peace.” By the good news of our salvation brought to Mary by the angel, hear us, O Lord.

People: Lord, grant us peace.

Officiant: By the mystery of the Word made flesh, hear us, O Lord.

People: Lord, grant us peace.

Officiant: By the birth in time of the timeless Son of God, hear us, O Lord.

People: Lord, grant us peace.

Officiant: By the manifestation of the King of glory to the shepherds and magi, hear us, O Lord.

People: Lord, grant us peace.

Officiant: By the submission of the maker of the world to Mary and Joseph of Nazareth, hear us, O Lord.

People: Lord, grant us peace.

Officiant: By the baptism of the Son of God in the river Jordan, hear us, O Lord.

People: Lord, grant us peace.

Officiant: Grant that the kingdoms of this world may become the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; hear us, O Lord.

People: Lord, grant us peace.

THE COLLECT

Almighty God, on the holy mount you revealed to chosen witnesses your well-beloved Son, wonderfully transfigured: mercifully deliver us from the darkness of this world and change us into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

People: Amen

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Officiant: And now, as our Saviour Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

People: 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, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

DISMISSAL

Officiant: Let us bless the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

NOTICES

Blessing

Officiant: The Lord bless us and keep us. The Lord make his face shine on us and be gracious to us. The Lord look upon us with favour and grant us peace.

People: Amen.

Assisting Father Simon Bell today:

Officiant/Preacher: Fr. Simon

Video: David Paradis

This morning in our worship we remember in our prayers those of our family and friends who have immediate needs and concerns:

Brenda & Brian; Locke and Ellement families; Brennan Family; Derek; Rachelle Belleghem and her family; Teresa & Pete; Jaxon Croft; Ron & Jane Lewis; Staff and Residence at Roberta Place; Michelle & Ian Sinclair; Sean; Brian W.; Kevin H.; Diane M.; Bill Snow; Deborah Hall; Owen; Sophia L; Marianne S.; Amanda Stewart; Kathryn; Kadeem Broomes; Anna Sellers; Marty;.

The names below are people in need of ongoing prayers for various reasons so we ask you to please continue to pray for them and their continuing need of God's healing touch and grace:

Cecilia Mowat; Brenda Jessem; Jen Galicinski; Sheri Scott; Arlene; Joan Gough; Lorraine W; Stephanie; Fr. Murray; Amy P. & Family; Marg Abbott; Livia & Neil Purcell; Jordan; Margie Mills; Eunice Merrett; Jean Wallace; Nancy Dodds; Lee & Jeannie Martin; Bill & Cathy Gray; Wendy Goodyer; Michelle & Ian Sinclair; Donna Wilson; Garn Mennell; Margaret & Gordon Kennedy; Paul & Rose McIntyre; Jim Tomkins; Do Saunders; Jefferson Jr.; June Osolin; Martin & Stephen Bertelsen; Tanya Wade-Vargas.

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer we pray for:

The Anglican Church of Canada

In the Toronto Diocesan Cycle of Prayer we pray for:

The Bishop's Committee on Intercultural Ministry