

The Last Sunday After The Epiphany
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Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99:1-2, 3-4, 8, 9

2 Corinthians 3:12 – 4:2

Luke 9:28-36

Listen, Know, then Follow

I want to share a parable of sorts with you. A man was crawling through the desert on his hands and knees, desperate for a drink of water. He came upon a man selling neckties. “Would you like to buy a nice necktie?” asked the salesman. “All I want is a drink of water,” croaked the man. The salesman had no water, so the poor fellow crawled on across the sand.

Eventually he came upon a beautiful restaurant. “It must be a mirage,” he thought, but as he drew nearer he saw it was real. With his last ounce of energy he struggled up to the entrance and asked the doorman, “Please, sir, may I have a drink of water?” The doorman replied, “Sorry. Gentlemen are not admitted without neckties.”

Life is kind of like that sometimes, isn’t it? Life is a marvelous gift, but at times it can seem awfully unfair and very hard. At those times—which can stretch on and on—we can all too easily lose heart and lose our way. Today’s gospel is about one of those times. Jesus and the apostles are on the road to Jerusalem and he has just told them that he is going to die there. They’re crushed and confused and feeling mightily betrayed. Suddenly their lives and the last three years with him seem like a huge waste. It makes no sense.

Jesus understands this, so he takes them up to the top of the mountain and renews their hearts and their hopes by showing them where he is really headed, and that is to the resurrection. What exactly happened atop that mountain, we’ll never know, but we can be sure that something wonderful happened. Moses and Elijah appeared, the voice of God thundered forth as it did at Jesus’ baptism. And Jesus is presented as God’s chosen one who has come from glory and will return to glory. The voice from the cloud said, *“This is my Son, it is important that you listen to him.”*

Everyone has a favorite line from Scripture. This is one of my favorites because it’s addressed to me...directly. I need to listen for the ways in which God is speaking to me and showing me love. God speaks through people. It’s only by listening that I can hear God speaking. Not explaining, not defending, not justifying. Only saying simply: “Do you love me? Then trust me. I do care.” Jesus has come among us as a sign of God’s forgiving love. To think in more concrete terms, it’s as if someone you loved were suddenly caught in a terrible mudslide and buried by tons of mud. And without thinking, you throw yourself into the mud and sludge to reach that person you love, not even

thinking about yourself. That's what Jesus did. God's forgiveness is like that. It's fighting through badness to goodness. In forgiving, God gives us another shot at loving.

But if God loves us that much, then what's our problem? Why are we not overjoyed? I suppose it's part of our humanness. I don't think we believe much in forgiveness. If we don't believe in forgiveness, then we don't accept it. To be human is to be vulnerable, to be capable of being hurt. And that's hard. For me to be fully human in a religious sense means to know that I am not God. Rather, as a Christian, to be human is to understand that I am loved by God, and this allows me to love others.

When it comes to loving God, we're shy lovers. We're hesitant. We're like the insecure, self doubting young man who looks across the dance floor and sees the girl with whom he wants to dance. Finally, he gets the courage to ask her to dance. And she says she's been waiting for him to ask. He suddenly thinks maybe he's in love. She, of course has been loving all along. But now he knows he is loved. Knowing that makes all the difference in the world. We're a lot like that. We love God that way. At some level—in our head---we know God loves us, but we don't really believe that God likes us. After all, we think, God *has* to love me. It's like parents and their children: As parents we love our children, of course; it's when we can truly say that we like them that we know we've made it.

To each of us has been assigned the building of one piece of God's kingdom. The work is never fast and rarely easy. Too often it seems impossible and sometimes even pointless. We can lose heart and lose our way, and sometimes we do. But always, in even the darkest times, our Lord is there, calling us for just a moment to the mountaintop, showing us yet again where we're headed, to the resurrection, and reassuring us once more we do not walk this rocky road alone, we are not building these lives of ours alone. Today's Gospel is about listening and knowing and following.

Lent is almost upon us. During Lent we often think about "giving up" something. Suggest...forget about giving up. Forget about replacing the chocolate and lattes with carrot sticks and yogurt. Instead, during this season of Lent, take time to listen. Listen to Jesus in his Word. Listen to the Word of God in the world around you...ordinary events...hum drum moments. Then you'll begin to know.

But it's not enough for us to merely know that God loves. Life is lived one moment at a time and love is granted to those who choose to be fully alive—that requires vulnerability. It's not enough to *know* that God loves you, to know that God *will* dance with you. We need to respond. We need to scrunch up our courage and take that long walk across the dance floor, look God straight in the eye and stammer, "Would you like to dance with me, please?" I can guarantee the answer.

Last Epiphany
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