

6th Sunday after the Epiphany Sunday Feb. 14, 2021

Trinity UMC Iron Mountain, MI Pastor Geri Hamlen

Our reading of Mark's Gospel today is taken from *The Message* interpretation. You will be hearing the details of the Transfiguration of Christ...that we are celebrating this a.m. The Illumination on the Mountaintop event. Hear the reading...Mark 9, verses 2 – 9.

Just before our reading this a.m., Jesus has told his disciples yet again, that the Kingdom of God is near...and that some of them would see the kingdom of God arrive in full force in their lifetime.

Scripture Mark 9:2 - 9

Six days later, three of them *did* see it.

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain.

His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes.

His clothes shimmered, glistening white,
whiter than any bleach could make them.

Elijah, along with Moses, came into view, in deep conversation with Jesus.

⁵⁻⁶ Peter interrupted,

“Rabbi, this is a great moment!

Let's build three memorials—one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah.”

He blurted this out without thinking,
stunned as they all were by what they were seeing.

⁷Just then a light-radiant cloud enveloped them,
and from deep in the cloud, a voice:

“This is my Son, marked by my love. Listen to him.”

⁸The next minute the disciples were looking around,
rubbing their eyes, seeing nothing but Jesus, only Jesus.

⁹⁻¹⁰Coming down the mountain, Jesus swore them to secrecy.

“Don't tell a soul what you saw.

After the Son of Man rises from the dead, you're free to talk.”

They puzzled over that, wondering what on earth “rising from the dead” meant.

The words of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God

Message ‘*All Roads Lead to God*'

This Season of Epiphany, each year, starts with a brightly lit/illuminated star in the night sky...as long distance visitors searched and found the Messiah, Emmanuel. At the end of their long journey, they found ‘God with us’ in the baby, the child, the man Jesus.

From there, the Epiphany Season always leads us to the River Jordan and The Baptism of repentance that John the Baptizer offers first to the crowds and then to Jesus.

With the first Baptism of the Holy Spirit, Jesus walks into the darkness of the river Jordan and emerges into the light, hearing the voice of God saying...This is my son...Listen to him.

Yes, the Epiphany season started with God, on earth as in heaven. Jesus Community Building activities were centered around his declaration that the time has come. The Kingdom of God is near. And, ultimately, the life of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark shows us how everything, how all roads leads us to God—if we keep our eyes and our ears and our hearts open.

Peter, James and John had no idea where the road was leading them that day as they climbed that mountain with Jesus. Maybe it was a sunny day? Maybe it was overcast. Maybe they were up early. We know that Jesus got up early to pray...Or maybe it was mid-afternoon. They were probably talking, maybe humming a tune. Maybe deep in thought or maybe just not thinking about much of anything and then all of a sudden, out of nowhere...the road led them to something special.

What started as ordinary became extraordinary.

What started as The usual became unusual.

The normal became abnormal.

The expected moved into the unexpected.

And whammo...Jesus, their friend, their teacher, their guide was transformed.

His appearance changed from the inside out, right before their eyes.

His clothes shimmered, glistening white,

whiter than any bleach could make them.

It's a pretty good guess that Peter, James and John were unacquainted with Science Fiction, with the paranormal, with hallucinogens that might have explained this transfiguration event. No...their frame of reference for what was going on was the power and presence of God. The power of the Holy One to break into this world.

They were pre-disposed, more so than we, to see God at work in what was going on because they had been traveling with Jesus and seen miracles of feeding, of healing. They had even seen Jesus walking on the water in a wind-storm which had to have been pretty amazing.

Now, if you read back into Chapter 6 & 7 of Mark, you will see that the disciples had already experienced God with them as they went out, two by two, healing and casting out demons. But, especially in Chapter 7, we read that they had trouble understanding what was going on. They were astounded! Astounded even beyond measure at what Jesus was doing. They were faithfully following instructions! They were serving others and listening closely to what Jesus said and watching intently what he was doing...but they didn't understand. They must have been asking, how is it that all things lead to God in this world which is so filled with sickness and struggle and hopelessness. In Mark Chapter 8, Jesus said to them, 'You fail to understand the truth of what you are seeing because you continue to set your mind on human things rather than on divine things.'

And after all of that, then they came to the mountain road that led to this Transfiguration event. Seeing Jesus Transformed by light must have been amazing enough...but add to that the presence of Moses and Elijah! How could those disciples possibly consider themselves in the human realm when they already knew that Moses and Elijah were many, many centuries dead? But look...there they were, alive and well and chatting up Jesus!

Moses and Elijah...we know that they are pretty big Super stars in the Bible. Peter, James and John would have known that too, in so much more detail about how often Moses went up on the mountain to communicate with God. To receive the tablets with the 10 Commandments. Which Moses smashed when the people started worshipping that Golden calf and then back up

the mountain he went again...to meet up with God for a re-print. Those mountain trips that Moses took were also marked, like in this Transfiguration story, with lights and shadows. With smoke and flames. Sure signs of God's presence. All roads lead to God...

Elijah also would have resonated with the disciples of Jesus...because Elijah had to flee from his enemies, who wanted to kill him. And Elijah went into a mountain cave and...all roads lead to God...there was God. Not in the wind. Not in the earthquake. Not even in the fire. But no...God was in the still small voice that asked and listened and instructed Elijah on next steps and actions that God wanted done.

All roads lead to God and Jesus was preparing his disciples and his followers to encounter God on earth as God is in heaven. Because, remember Jesus had a Mission Statement... *The Kingdom of God draws near. Repent and live as those who know that God loves them.* We have seen through this season of Epiphany that Jesus was teaching his disciples and us to resist the evil demons. To serve each other with healing and meaningful service. We have heard how Jesus was building community because living this life and travelling whatever road...is too lonely by ourselves. Through our baptism in the community of faith, we support each other and encourage each other to see God in our daily lives. And to follow God in all the seasons and arenas of our lives. Together, we can do so much more, and travel so much further than we could ever do by ourselves. As long as we remember that all roads are pointing, are leading us towards God.

Of course, the road is not a straight line, is it? There are twists and turns. Unexpected curves. Detours and bridges that are out. Even dark clouds and shadows like the disciples experienced that day of Transfiguration. There are pandemics and politicians who disappoint. There is history that comes to light and causes disturbance. There are unhealed wounds in our personal relationships and our community dynamics. The road gets hard to see and even harder to follow at times. But the baptismal vows we took...the covenant that God made with us...the steadfast love that endures forever is still there because all roads lead to God. Because God is with us always.

This Trinity Church has travelled far and wide in our 67 years together. We have had our highs and our lows. I think of the Central English Church in 1944...burned to the ground. I think of the two congregations, Wesley and Central coming together and in 1964, walking up the street to enter into this building. All roads lead to God...And how many wonderful people have found that their road leads them right here. Where God lives and where the Unique attributes of this congregation include sharing God's love with those who hunger. How many children have been baptized into the community of faith here with this very baptismal font. How many have come back to be married here, baptize their own babies, and teach the Sunday School which is just another road leading to God.

As we close out this Season of Epiphany, we are moving into a time of Repentance and contemplation. This next Season, of Lent, is also a road that leads to God. Starting on Wednesday, we will be reminded, that from dust we come and to dust we shall return. Lent will give us a chance to appeal to the saving grace that God offers us from Jesus. A grace and a love that pours down like a mighty stream...to wash us clean and to move us into a way of life that is even more holy and loving and useful.

As we continue our journey with Jesus through the Gospel of Mark, we will get to travel to Jerusalem with him. Jerusalem, the city that kills its prophets. Knowing that we are on a road that leads to God.

We will travel the road of Betrayal that Jesus followed as his friends fell away in hard times, one after another. Knowing that even in betrayal, all roads lead to God.

We will experience, as Jesus did, the horrors of corrupt governments and the machinations of mis-guided religious organizations. None-the-less...all roads lead to God.

So be thinking this week about how you can be preparing yourself to be surprised and overtaken by God on your personal road. Yes, Lent is so often a time of 'giving up' something precious as a sign to God that you are serious and mean business. I do know one friend of mine, however, who during Lent gives up being terminally serious. And offers to God the sacrifice of a joyful and grateful heart...rather than a worried and fretful anxiety. I know other people who draw closer to God by giving up each week, a bag of stuff...that they don't use or want or need. Giving it away or throwing it away. The absence of stuff is a road that leads definitely to God.

Whatever you choose to do...let God be your guide. Ask in prayer for guidance from God to the road that is best for you at this time in your life. Pursue with faith and with hope and with love, the path that brings you closer and closer to that beautiful kingdom of God, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.