



race Church

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Rector

SHOW JESUS

Sermon for the Last Sunday after Epiphany, February 7, 2016

Reading: Luke 9:28-36

Canterbury Cathedral, the mother church of England and seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury, has a very short mission statement: “to show people Jesus.” They got it from the gospel of John, chapter 12 verse 20: “Among those who went to the Temple to worship were people who came saying “Sir, we would like to see Jesus.”

The former Dean of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale used to cite this mission statement as a challenge to the seminarians under his care preparing to go out as priests, teachers and pastors: how are you going to show people Jesus?

We might ask the same question of ourselves, as individuals and as a church.

This morning, on the last Sunday of Epiphany, we read the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus, when he was revealed on the mountain top to be the radiant Messiah, the true Son of God. Peter, James and John were there to see. But Jesus told them not to tell anyone what they saw until after his death and resurrection. Of course at the time they had no idea to make of any of this.

It was not given to many to see the fully revealed nature of Jesus. To most he was just another Jew, a Galilean, a country boy who made claims to be a teacher of the Law, about whom wild stories of miraculous healing and others wonders were told. Even the other disciples never saw him transfigured the way those three did, not at least until after the Resurrection. And even then it was pretty confusing.

I suppose it still is. How can we claim that this one man from one place a long way away and a long time ago was so special, so unique that we call him Christ, the Messiah and claim he is the true Son of God, God with us, incarnate as a human? Hard to get your mind around; hard to see as possible or true.

But something about Jesus is compelling, attractive. “Sir, we want to see Jesus,” they asked the disciples. Why?

“What did you come to see?” Jesus asked those who had flocked to see John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness. You didn’t come to see reeds blowing in the wind. There are many place to see that. You didn’t come to see a man dressed in fancy clothes. Go to the palace for a fashion show. No, you came to see a prophet. You came to see someone who is speaking the word of God.

And what if the Word of God shows up as a helpless child who depends on us?

Last Tuesday was the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. It is also called the Purification of Mary. It commemorates the episode recounted in Luke when after the prescribed forty days of waiting, the young mother Mary is allowed to come back to the Temple and together with Joseph make the ritual offering of their firstborn male to God. The Torah permitted the parents to “redeem” the child with a suitable offering. The suitable offering was an unblemished lamb—unless you were too poor to afford one, in which case you could get by with a pair of turtledoves or pigeons. And this was what Joseph and Mary had to do.

Here’s what scripture shows: God came among us in a poor family scraping to get by. They didn’t come to the temple expecting any recognition for presenting their beautiful boy—they just were trying to meet the religious requirements of their tribe.

But there was Simeon and Anna, two elderly prophets. Simeon had been told he wouldn’t die until he had seen the Messiah. How long he waited, we aren’t told—but by the relief expressed in his song it must have been a long time. Now, he said, he could die in peace.

How many babies’ faces had he looked at, wondering if this was the one. Until he saw Jesus.

Anna as well, a widow for 85 years—and all that time or most of it hanging about the Temple, praying, doing odd jobs. Until that day when an unremarkable poor young couple brought their firstborn to be redeemed. Until Simeon, excitedly, said this is the one, the Messiah who will save Israel. Oh then Anna looked herself—and she saw the same anointed one. To those two elders the baby was shown. And at least two of the people saw something very special in what for others was an ordinary baby.

Some see God on the mountaintop shining like the sun, like the transfigured Christ. But Jesus himself taught us how to see him even today in a humbler way.

In Matthew 25 Jesus said that when the time for judgement came, he would separate people into sheep and goats, one on the right and one on the left. To those on the right he would say, you fed me when I was hungry, clothed me when I was cold, visited me when I was in prison. When did we do that, they ask? When you visited the poor and the least of the people in your life. And just so, those who did not do this to the poor and small did not do right by me. They didn’t see me in their neighbor’s face.

So that tells us that we can still meet Jesus today—not bright shining as the sun, and not as a figure frozen in history two thousand years ago—but in each other and especially in those who need our help. If you look to help, you may find your eyes are open like the old prophets Simeon and Anna, and you will see the face of Christ in the face of those you befriend.

It is the job of the church to show Jesus. I hope we will continue to strive to do this in every way we can. And it is your job to seek his face in

the face of others, to feel love in your heart and to seek to follow the will of God the Father as he did.

May Christ show us the Way. Amen.

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