

Get Up!

Year A, Last Sunday after the Epiphany – Matthew 17:1-9

preached by the Rector at Trinity, Columbus, March 6, 2011

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Little Tommy's Sunday School teacher finished telling her class of six- and seven-year-olds the story we just heard a moment ago, the story of Jesus' glorious Transfiguration on the mount of blessing and the children sat in wide-eyed amazement. Of course, the teacher wanted to make sure they had all heard and understood the lesson, so she asked Tommy to tell what had happened in his own words.

Tommy clamored to his feet. "Well, Jesus went with the disciples," he began, "and then he started shining like a light bulb." "Then Moses and that other guy came along and talked to Jesus, and Peter said they should build a house, but it got real cloudy, so they didn't want to do all that work." "Oh... oh, and then God said, 'Stop talking about houses and listen to my Son!'" "And then everybody got really scared, because God talks really loud, and so they fell down all scared!"

With that, Tommy plopped back down on the floor as both the teacher and the rest of the children beamed their approval of his retelling of the story. "That was very good, Tommy," the teacher continued, "but where were they when all this happened?" Tommy sprang to his feet again, "Oh, they were on a mountain... a hiiiiigh mountain," he offered excitedly. "That's right, Tommy," the teacher enthused, inwardly pretty proud that she had conveyed the lesson so well. "And why do you think they went up there to the mountain?" Tommy's confident face dissolved into a more studied expression, and then into perplexity, but then quickly resolved into proud accomplishment, "They went up there to do their math homework." Now it was the teacher's confident look that dissolved. She glanced down at the notes in her lap, hoping to see something she had missed in the Gospel's story of the Transfiguration. "Tommy," she asked, "what make you think they were doing math?" "Well," the little boy beamed, "you said when they went up there, Jesus went and he figured."

In this morning's Gospel lesson, the three members of Jesus' "inner-circle" are treated to what had to be the most extraordinary experiences. Here they are, up on a mountaintop with their friend and teacher, not to do homework *per se*, but on a leadership retreat of sorts, a time to pray and to plan for the mission and ministry before them.

Instead, they get a glimpse of heaven, the thin veneer of time and space is peeled back to see Jesus as the Christ, radiant in the *glory* of God and flanked by Moses and that other guy, Elijah, one the giver of the Law in this morning's Old Testament reading, the other the epitome of the Prophets, the symbols of the fulfillment of God's plan for the people of God. As if that weren't enough, the voice of God thunders, "This is my son, my beloved in whom I am well pleased." We have heard that voice and that proclamation before, at Jesus' baptism, but this time he adds the command, "Listen to him."

It must have been an exceptional experience, an astonishing opportunity, an awesome, glorious revelation. And yet what was the disciples' response? Matthew tells us that they fell to the ground, overcome by fear. Left on their own, we are left with the impression that they may have stayed huddled on that mountaintop for the rest of their lives. But Jesus comes to them and touches them and calls them again as he had called them each at Galilee. "Get up!" he says, "And do *not* be afraid."

In the shining face of Jesus in our lives, we are sometimes tempted to retreat into what is more solid and familiar and perhaps just a bit less... challenging. The Gospel says that Peter wanted to just set up permanent camp on the hilltop, content to stay right there for the rest of his years. But don't you know that big ol' Peter was probably *also* thinking, "Oh, man, let's go back to fishing for lake perch or bass or tilapia – even carp, for pity's sake – *anything*, instead of fishing for people like he has called us to do." When faced with the enormity of Jesus' call on our lives, we may want to just go back to comfort and familiarity of *our* pew. When faced with the call of Jesus to take the transforming, transfiguring moment of the mountaintop and move to the mission of bringing help to the helpless or reaching out to our family and to our friends and even to people we don't know from... *Elijah*, we sometimes want to pull our knees up to our chest, bury our head in our hands and say, "Let me just warm my hands a bit longer at the comforting glow of your glory." But Jesus comes to us, and touches us, and calls us yet again: "Get up – and do not be afraid."

Then again, faced with glory of Jesus, we may be tempted to say, "Let someone else do it." I hate to pick on ol' Pete again, but can't you imagine that the thought ran through his head, "How did Andrew get me into this? Why isn't *he* up here instead of me? What made me think it was a good idea to listen to my baby brother, anyway?" When we realize what all is involved in the mission to which Jesus calls each of us as a consequence of our baptism into his death and resurrection, sometimes we get to thinking that maybe we should shove the responsibility off on someone "more talented," or "more educated," or "better suited." Maybe we should let the government feed the poor – so long as they only spend the money on the poor that *we're* talking about, and never, ever touch *our* entitlement, or *our* tax loophole, or *our* children's trust funds. Maybe we should let the other churches, the ones who seem to be more suited to the task, reach out to those in our community who do not know the love of Jesus – so long as they keep their laughably ignorant interpretation of the Bible to themselves. Maybe if someone else would just take better care of things, we wouldn't have to risk exposure or disappointment or failure.

We could come up with thousands of perfectly high sounding reasons why it shouldn't be *us*, why it shouldn't be *here*, why it shouldn't be *now*. But when all the intricate maze of excuses is disentangled, Jesus comes to us, and Jesus touches us, and Jesus calls us yet again: "Get up – and do not be afraid."

Dear friends, our Gospel this morning calls us to stand on the mountaintop again and again to see the absolute glory of Christ revealed to our sometimes overwhelmed hearts. Our Gospel this morning cries out to us to leave the mountaintop of meeting to engage the valley of mission. Our Gospel this morning challenges us to witness again and again and again to the kingdom and the power and the dazzling *glory* that we have seen in the work of Jesus Christ in our own hearts and lives. In the face of such challenge, we cannot shrink or flinch with fear, because the same Jesus whose glory we have seen, the same Jesus who has filled our hearts with his mercy and his grace, the same Jesus who has declared his love for you and for me a thousand times, and in a thousand ways, that same Jesus comes to us, that same Jesus touches us, that same Jesus calls us to courage and to commitment in serving *him*. "Get up," he says again, "and do not be afraid."