

Reflection for our Parish Harvest Festival.

Sunday before Lent – Transfiguration Sunday.
Readings: Isaiah 49 13-16a & Matthew 17:1-9

Feb 26, 2017

We still have bottles of last year's quinces. They're here on the harvest display table if anyone wants to make a donation for them, and bring back the bottle. Currently there's a quince war waging between the sulphur-crested cockatoos and us. Since I perfected a screech that you may well be able to hear right across the valley they haven't been back, but they're watching...

Quinces ripen around the same time as the grapes. They store all that golden sunshine and take on a glorious yellow as the misty mornings creep in, just before the leaves start to turn. Eating bottled quinces and peaches from the backyard trees in the middle of winter when the fire is blazing to keep out the cold feels like inviting sunshine into your body, so delicious!

In the story from Matthew's gospel, when Peter and James and John went up the high mountain with Jesus, Peter's immediate response to Jesus appearing dazzling white and speaking with Moses and Elijah was to somehow bottle the experience: to capture it and build dwellings so that the conversation and holy community could continue. I love the way Peter just responds with whatever is in his heart. In the story before this one, the disciples had been talking with Jesus about who people say that he is. Peter's response was quick and correct; 'you are the Messiah, the son of the living God.' Now Peter is able to see with his own eyes what those words mean and he wants to bottle this experience, to build dwellings, to preserve it in a way that it will never fade and he can always taste the awesomely bright and blessed goodness that he is witnessing.

God overshadows Peter and it is then, not before, that the disciples fall to the ground in fear. They can manage seeing an appearance of their faith ancestors and that their beloved Jesus is dazzling in glory, the embodiment of Shekinah, holy light, but they cannot bear a direct hit from God. No one can see God and live, and they want to live, so they hide their faces and fall down in fear. Fair enough.

God's voice is an echo of the voice at Jesus' baptism. Affirming who Jesus is and then with this command, 'Listen to him.' Stop talking Peter and listen, listen to what Jesus is saying, listen. Now that's a good idea. How often do we stop the soundtrack of our own or other voices and just listen?

Let's listen..... what do you hear? One of the important techniques of meditation is to listen. You can't block out sounds that come from your environment, but you can acknowledge them and let them go. You can't block out the thoughts that arise from within you, but you can acknowledge them and let them go. Being still and listening can allow us to hear the still, small voice of God, like Elijah in the cave. You know the verse, 'Be still, and know that I am God.'

When the voice is quiet, when the talking is stilled, when the big moment is over, Jesus touches the disciples. He reaches out and makes contact – the divine reaching out to the fearful. He tells Peter, James and John, 'Get up, and do not be afraid' and life becomes recognizable again and together they go back to the valley, back to the everyday of life as a disciple of Jesus. They go back to find that the other disciples are struggling with healing a young boy, the choices and the challenges of life continue.

Harvest time in the valley, whatever is being harvested, from the early cherries to the late grapes is a time of frenzied activity, but it is reliant on the work of the rest of the year, just like in our vegetable gardens. The pruning, planting, watering, feeding. The watching and the waiting. The decision to pull up the stock and replant. The decision to spray with this or that and the challenges of the unpredictable seasons. Today, as we give thanks for the harvest, we commit ourselves again to our everyday work, in all the things that grow in our lives; our food, our faith, our skills and gifts, our relationships and the stories of hope and peace that we share with our friends.

Moses, Elijah, & Jesus were mountain people. This is a story of human ascent and divine descent. We move towards the God who is moving towards us, like the father and the son, in the story of the prodigal son. These mountain men went up to engage with God, up into the cloud to collect the commandments, to experience blessing, to encounter the shining glory and hear the voice that makes you tremble with holy fear. In some ways our Sundays might be like that, or our prayer time or bible study. We come to our churches as places where we listen for the voice of God, are surrounded by our ancestors in the faith and are reminded that our names are written on God's hand. But we can't stay here. Jesus touches us, lifts us out of whatever fear is holding us, and with the voice of the shepherd who knows his sheep says 'get up, and don't be afraid.' Fear is a forgetting of faith. Don't be afraid about your crop, your livelihood, your life or your death. The touch of Jesus dispels fear and tells us to 'get up and get on with life.' So we do. Thanks be to God, Amen.

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