

Sermon for February 14, 2021

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Our gospel text today begins “Six days later...” What was happening six days ago?

Just prior to our Gospel reading for today, in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is foretelling of his death and resurrection. He was teaching them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again.

Six days ago Peter was listening to Jesus openly share, then pulling him aside Peter rebukes Jesus.

Six days ago...Peter rebukes Jesus! We don't know what Peter says but we can imagine he doesn't want Jesus talking this way. Talk of great suffering, rejection, death...that's frightening stuff and not in line with what the disciples expect to hear from the one just recently recognized as the divine. It is so alarming that Peter rebukes the man he just identified as Messiah.

It is helpful to remember that right before this moment six days ago, just before that...after feeding the four thousand and curing the deaf and blind, Jesus asked Peter “who do you say that I am?” and Peter had answered “You are the Messiah...” Now Peter rebukes him for detailing what this will mean... He has used the title but now is unable to hear the meaning of the divine identity.

In response to the rebuke, Jesus looks at his disciples and publicly rebukes Peter – “Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things...”

As if to say “You recognized the divine for a moment but are lost again in human concerns...”

Six days later...our gospel continues. I wonder what those six days were like. Was Peter hurt, ashamed? Was Peter defensive and upset with Jesus? Did he spend time trying to prove himself? Did Jesus and Peter interact? Did they have further discussion?

All we know is six days later Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain. Despite rebuking Peter, Jesus keeps Peter with him. Jesus invites him to continue the journey with him. Jesus leads them up a high mountain apart – by themselves.

Up a high mountain apart - by themselves. “Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things...” Up a high mountain apart – by themselves.

We will later learn that there is a crowd at the bottom of the mountain. The disciples that stay behind are pressed in upon by human things. Scribes come and argue with them. People have come to be healed. A father brings a son who is seizing, dashing himself at the ground, foaming at the mouth, grinding his teeth and the disciples are helpless, unable to change the chaos around them, their minds full of human things.

Jesus will come down the mountain and the first thing he will say is “You faithless generation...”

Up a high mountain apart by themselves – Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things... - Up a high mountain apart by themselves.

Peter stood with Jesus on the mountain, away from the chaos of the human things below and he watched as Jesus was transfigured before them. His clothes become dazzling white. The scripture even states “such as no one on earth could bleach them”. This was not a human thing; this was a divine thing. Peter watches as Elijah and Moses appear and speak with Jesus.

What do they say I wonder? What does Peter hear? How does Peter even know who they are? It does not say but Peter says...

“Rabbi....It is good for us to be here.”

It goes on to say “Peter did not know what to say, for they were terrified.”

This was not a human thing; this was a divine thing. And Peter does not know what to say except for “It is good for us to be here....”

Then a cloud overshadowed them and they hear a voice “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”

“Listen to him!” What was the last thing we heard him say to Peter?

“Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things....”

Up a high mountain apart by themselves - The chaos of human things below - It is good for us to be here - Mind set on the divine.

Jesus brings Peter with him up that mountain. His divinity is revealed before Peter. It shines before him.

This Peter! – set your mind on this! Jesus radiates light, the glory of God, the divine. One imagines Peter shielding his eyes. “This is my Son – Listen to him!” Set your mind on this... the glory of God revealed in and through Christ.

And while Peter wants to stay – to build dwellings – to stay in the place where the divine is seen and heard and blazing in your mind – they return down the mountain called forth to the human things below. Will Peter return down the mountain with his mind set on divine things? Will he still say, as things terrify him, the words “It is good for us to be here...” – even when the divine path leads to the cross? Can he continue to see the divine, to cling to the divine, who stands amidst the ordinary, amidst and over the human things?

We know that is not how the story goes... Peter will again lose sight of the divine. He will desert Jesus in the garden, deny Jesus during the trials. And he will weep... He will once again get lost in the human things...he will lose sight of the divine still present with him.

But after the crucifixion, within the darkness, as the women arrive at the tomb, angels in dazzling white will once again shine light on the divine – “He is not here he has been raised!” In the gospel of Mark they will specifically instruct the women to go and tell Peter...

“You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” Here is the ultimate mountain top experience, greater than all human things... Resurrection! This is the divine!

We like Peter confess our faith, then fall into a mindset of human things. We believe in God but then get uncomfortable with what that really means. We get lost in the chaos at the bottom of the mountain. We lose site of the light of Christ, our minds crowded once again with human things.

Up a high mountain - apart by themselves.

Is Jesus inviting you to follow him away from the chaos of human things, to see again the presence of the divine, to give you fresh eyes to see Jesus and fresh ears to hear the voice of God? Do you need to intentionally journey with Jesus to see again the light of Christ shining amidst the darkness? Let Jesus lead you up and apart long enough to give you a glimpse of the kingdom which dwells among us all the time.

This week we begin Lent. Maybe this is the invite we need to hear as we journey the next 40 days. Maybe we need to say “Get behind me Satan! For you are setting my mind not on divine things but on human things.” Time to set our mind on the divine - For it is good to be there...

Whether time in prayer, meditation, scripture reading, silent walks in God’s presence... How is Jesus inviting you up and apart that you may see the light and carry it with you into the world? How might God renew your mind, free you from clinging to human concerns to trust again in the divine?

You can’t stay on the mountaintop - we aren’t ever called to dwell there, but neither can we live without these moments of fixing our minds on the light. For it is the light that shines on us, that fuels us for the chaos below.

Every time Peter falters, gets lost in the human things, Jesus stays with him and creates an opportunity for him to once again see the divine light shine.

“The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.” John 1

This is the promise - Jesus – the light shines – the darkness cannot overcome it. Set your mind on this. It is good...