

The Reverend Jon Hauerwas – February 14, 2021 – A Voice

The First Lesson Psalm 50:1-6 Old Testament

- 1 The mighty one, God the LORD,
speaks and summons the earth
from the rising of the sun to its setting.
- 2 Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God shines forth.
- 3 Our God comes and does not keep silence,
before him is a devouring fire,
and a mighty tempest all around him.
- 4 He calls to the heavens above
and to the earth, that he may judge his people:
- 5 “Gather to me my faithful ones,
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!”
- 6 The heavens declare his righteousness,
for God himself is judge.

The Second Lesson Mark 9:2-9 New Testament

2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, 3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. 4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. 5 Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” 6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. 7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” 8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. 9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

In the world around us, there are many voices competing for our attention. Some of these could rightly be called idols. They are readily evident, and are often

expressed using language of the “good life.” Modern idols include materialism, greed, economic growth, productivity, waste and ecological degradation, longing for more and endless desires, and individualism. ¹

And each of these idols come with a cost. Americans often report high levels of stress and boredom, of scattered, constantly diverted attention, and feelings of rushing and restlessness, time anxiety, perfection seeking, a desire to eradicate emptiness, and persistent pursuit of the promise of happiness. At some point along the way, we got off track, and we confused the so-called good life with the abundant life we seek in Christ. ²

In the depths of our being, many of us are searching for a more meaningful existence. The endless pursuit of the good life, with all of its trappings, has not produced the results that we desired. We know that what God offers is better than this, and we want to be a part of it. Still, it is incredibly difficult for us to make a change. To extend compassion to all of creation. To embody justice. To live a life of voluntary simplicity, and to consume only what we need. ³

¹ Schut, Michael, and Bill McKibben. *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective*. Church Publishing, 2009.

² Schut.

³ Schut.

In pursuit of the good life, we often feel empty and incomplete. The alternative entails slowing down, and appreciating time, and practicing gratitude and mindfulness. The abundant life is visible in prayer, in meditation, in reflection, in listening, and in silence. And it demonstrated by a radical yearning for love.⁴

As we affirm the abundant life, we accept responsibility for shared community and for all of creation. We recognize the need to honor Sabbath rest for the earth and for all creatures. And we engage, not by hoarding our resources but by sharing our wealth, by identifying with the marginalized, by living a life of grateful stewardship, through acts of advocacy, and in pursuit of the promise of deep joy. Friends, this is the life we have in Christ.⁵ And yet, we often fail to see it, to acknowledge it, and to live it. In this, we are not alone.

In our second lesson this morning, we learn that three trusted disciples, Peter, James, and John, ascended the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus. And there, in the presence of the divine, they were “perplexed and unable to make sense of what had happened.”⁶ How often do we respond in the same manner to the changes in our environment? How hard is it, particularly during times of stress, to practice what

⁴ Schut.

⁵ Schut.

⁶ Gennifer Benjamin Brooks, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year B, Volume 1*. Ed. Joel B. Green (Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 324.

we profess to believe? This passage reminds us that the command to “listen to him” is a challenging but life giving response.⁷

Nearly one hundred years ago, the African American preacher Vernon Johns delivered the following message on Transfiguration Sunday. “It is good to be present when the ordinary is transformed; when the dull plain garments of a peasant become shining white, and the obscure ‘mountain place, apart,’ comes into the gaze of centuries. It is good to see the commonplace illumined and the glory of the common people revealed. On the Mount of Transfiguration, there is no representative of wealth, social rank, or official position. The place could boast in the way of population [of] only four poor men, members of a despised race, and of the remnant of a subjected and broken nation.”⁸

“But, it is here, instead of Jerusalem or Rome, that the voice of God is heard. It is here, instead of Mount Moriah, where the mighty temple stands, that the cloud of glory hovers. Out there, where a carpenter and three fishermen kept vigil with the

⁷ Brooks, 324.

⁸ Vernon Johns, “Transfigured Moments” (ca. 1925), in *Preaching with Sacred Fire: An Anthology of African American Sermons, 1750 to the Present*, ed. Frank A. Thomas and Martha Simmons (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 405.

promise of a new day, God is a living Reality and life is charged with meaning and radiance. Out there in a deserted place, the meek and lowly are enabled.”⁹

Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass maintain that “You join by jumping in where you are: learning the hymns, volunteering to welcome the homeless, seeking companions who will support you in prayer as you say yes to God and no to the destructive forces in your life.”¹⁰ Each Christian practice “is ancient, and larger than you are; it weaves you together with other people in doing things none of us could do alone. But each practice is also ever new, taking fresh form each day as it subtly adapts to find expression in every neighborhood and land.”¹¹

“Christian practices are things Christian people do together over time in response to and in light of God’s active presence for the life of the world in Jesus Christ.”¹² “Enter a Christian practice, and you will find that you are part of a community that has been doing this thing for centuries – not doing it as well as it should, to be sure, but doing it steadily, in conscious continuity with stories of the Bible and in frequent conversation about how to do it better.”¹³

⁹ Johns, 405.

¹⁰ Bass, Dorothy C. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. (John Hoboken: Wiley & Sons, 2010), 7.

¹¹ Bass, 7.

¹² Bass, 5.

¹³ Bass, 7.

“While the decision to *begin* following Jesus may be remembered as a moment, actually *becoming* a disciple is a process that will take some time.”¹⁴ This is why “the early church father Athanasius advised, ‘For the searching and right understanding of the Scriptures, there is need of a good life and a pure soul... One cannot possibly understand the teaching of the saints *unless one has a pure mind and is trying to imitate their life.*’”¹⁵

Friends, our choice, then, is between listening to the endless voices advocating for the so-called good life, or to focus, instead, on *the* voice, pointing to the way of abundant life. In both his baptism and in this moment of Transfiguration, God reveals and makes clear to anyone listening that this is the Son of God.”¹⁶ “When we see Jesus’, we see the glory of God.”¹⁷ May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.

¹⁴ Brad J. Kallenberg, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year B, Volume 1*. Ed. Joel B. Green (Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 312.

¹⁵ Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word of God*, trans. Penelope Lawson (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 96. Emphasis added.

¹⁶ Jeffrey A. Conklin-Miller, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year B, Volume 1*. Ed. Joel B. Green (Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 318.

¹⁷ Gennifer Benjamin Brooks, *Connections: A Lectionary Commentary for Preaching and Worship, Year B, Volume 1*. Ed. Joel B. Green (Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 324.