
2nd Sunday of Lent Year C
Fr. Harry Posner
Christ the Good Shepherd, ORCC
17 March 2019

When I was in the seminary, I had the opportunity to spend a semester in Israel, to walk the land where so many of our scriptural stories unfolded. It was a profound experience as I had the opportunity to walk the way of the cross, to swim in the Sea of Galilee, and walk the road to Emmaus. One of those experiences involved climbing Mt. Tabor, the setting of today's gospel.

Last week, in our gospel reading, we found Jesus alone in the desert, facing temptation as he pondered his calling. This week, we encounter Jesus on the top of a mountain with his dearest friends and God clearly speaks to them; transforms them. It's a moment when they feel the presence of God fully alive and active in their lives.

It's not a coincidence that the gospel readings for first two weeks of Lent place Jesus in such different settings. In our own lives, there are times when we find ourselves in the desert, feeling alone, feeling tempted, feeling confused, and perhaps even feeling abandoned by God. But, there are also times when we find ourselves fully alive in our faith. I imagine most of us vacillate between the desert and the mountaintop. The juxtaposition between the mountaintop and the desert reminds us that no matter where we find ourselves God is there. No matter what path we choose to follow, it can ultimately lead us to the Almighty.

In our first reading, God invited Abraham to take his son, the symbol of his future, and to begin a new journey forward, a journey that would begin our salvation history. When they reached the top of the mountain, God made it clear to Abraham that he had been chosen to chart a new future that would lead to the salvation of humanity. The cost for Abraham was to sacrifice his own narrow vision of what his future would hold and to allow God to lead him forward.

So, our story tells us that God asked Abraham to sacrifice that which he loved most in life, his own child. For us it's a shocking image. How could God ask Abraham to sacrifice his own child? But, the story is only meant to illustrate for us the importance of placing our hopes and our dreams in God. God didn't ask Abraham to kill his son, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his vision of the future and to allow God to lead him forward.

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In our gospel today, we see a similar story unfolding. Jesus gathers a few friends and takes them up to the top of Mt. Tabor so that they can see clearly, so they can understand. In their presence, Jesus is transfigured. It is there on the mountaintop that Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus. Peter, James, and John see the past, the plan that God began long ago. They see the connection between Jesus and the path that first began with Abraham and continued through Moses, the lawgiver, and Elijah the prophet. Peter, James, and John experienced a transformation where they came to understand that Jesus was not only their friend, but Jesus was also the fulfillment of the history of salvation.

It was on that mountaintop where the disciples began to see Jesus in a new way. It was there where their eyes were opened to the truth of Jesus. In Jesus, God bound himself so closely to humanity that we can never be separated. Think about it, there is nothing that could ever separate us from God's love. Whether we are in the desert or on the mountaintop, God is there with us, walking with us, offering us transforming love. That is the faith that leads us forward.

As it was for Abraham and those early followers of Jesus, we have a choice to open our eyes and follow where God leads or to continue to wander in the desert searching for something that will never satisfy. Our faith will be tested along the way, we will encounter detours and roadblocks, but if we hold fast to our faith, we will endure and we will grow stronger. God will guide us forward if we but trust.

Jesus conquered the power of evil with his cross. We may still encounter evil, we may still struggle, but the power of love will always triumph in the end. Whether we find ourselves in the desert or on the top of the mountain, we keep ourselves focused on the truth of Jesus by spending time in prayer, by getting our hands dirty living the gospel, and by making small sacrifices which keep us focused on God. Whatever path we choose to follow, God will be there with us, encouraging us to embrace the gospel and live it with our lives.