

GRACE CHURCH
LAST EPIPHANY- YEAR A (RCL)

Honesdale, PA
23 February 2020

Exodus 24: 12-18
Psalm 99
2 Peter 1: 16-21
Matthew 17: 1-9

ON THE SIDELINES

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I've often been like Peter, James, and John,
sitting on the bench on the sidelines of the action.
Several of us were driving one day
talking about interesting people we've met.
I said, "Well, I'm not interesting.
But I know people who know interesting people."
And one kind woman said, "Oh, Fr. Ed. But you are interesting."
That's like the parishioner who leaves Church one Sunday,
and at the Narthex takes the priest's hand, and says,
"Vicar, your sermon was interesting today."
And Vicar thinks, "Is that interesting good or interesting bad?
And is today's different than my other sermons...?
Are they interesting good, interesting bad, or just not interesting, period?"

In the same vein, when I was first hired as a full-time priest
in a small parish not too far away,
while class-mates were getting second or third priest positions
in what we call "Cardinal Parishes"
and I was considered for a position as 6th priest
in a metropolitan Washington DC parish,
"I'd rather be a big fish in a small pond."
It's pretty OK to sit on the sidelines watching the action,
instead of being *in* the action.
But that doesn't mean we get off the hook of the miracle of faith.
Sometimes, it's more important to be on the sidelines.

Consider where the faith of the Church would be,
if Peter, James and John weren't up that hill.
Weeks ago, at Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan, it was Jesus alone -
not even John the Baptist - who heard The Voice - just Jesus.
Yet now, today, there are witnesses.
Years after Jesus is Baptized and has performed his ministry,
and makes the descent to Jerusalem, death and another miracle.
We are called even in 2020 to be witnesses to God's miracles -
often in the most mundane.

Fr. Warren Thomas Swenson, a priest in West Missouri writes,

Instead of standing idle and waiting for God to be revealed to us in some extraordinary way, we [as faithful Christians] are called to get up every day and look for Jesus' presence in our ordinary lives. Admittedly, recognizing God at work in ordinary life can be difficult, especially when we face setbacks, sorrow, or general annoyance. But rest assured, God is there.

God is there with the widow whose Social Security check isn't quite enough to keep her in her home of over 50 years. God is there with the night school student who is late to class because her teenager got detention again. God is there with the young mother of four whose youngest refuses to potty-train. And God is even there with you when the cable guy doesn't show up between nine and noon.

All of God's people have bad days; the trick is learning to look for Jesus anyway.

Sermons that Work

I'm going to steal - plagiarize, that is - more of Fr. Swenson's sermon,
as we prepare for our Lenten Disciplines.

For Fr. Swenson gives us good hints as to how we start down Jesus' road to Jerusalem:

Our tradition gives us plenty of ways to look for Jesus.

A couple of daily doses of prayer should do the trick.

Reading the Bible helps.

Saying "I love you" is a good start.

Talking to God out loud is also a healthy thing to do,
especially when you're angry.

Coming to worship is also important,
not for the sake of average Sunday attendance,
but for the sake of your relationship with God,
a relationship fueled by hearing God's word
and participating in the rituals
of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

We are called, even in 2020, to be witnesses to God's miracles -

and most often in the mundane, every day encounters.

But don't rule out that you may sit on the sidelines some day

with Peter, James, and John, seeing the shining glory of God

and spread the news to the whole world.

AMEN.

CHILDREN'S SERMON Putting away "Alleluia!"

The word Alleluia on a banner, etc. and a gift box.

There's a special word we use mostly in Church.
Can you think of what it is?

That's right, "Alleluia."

It's a Hebrew word from all the way back in the Old Testament,
it means "Praise to God."

We're going to start Lent this Wednesday, as you learned in Sunday School.

We give up things, like chocolate, soda...

And we give up using the word, "Alleluia" for 40 days
until we "break it open" on Easter.

It will be more special when we remember Jesus' rising from the grave -
"Praise to God!"

So, we're going to hide "Alleluia" until Easter.

put the banner in the box, and close the lid.

And on Easter I'm going to have you look for it.

Let's pray:

Dear Jesus. You went for forty days in the desert and fasted. We're going to be fasting also for forty days in Lent. Help us to give up something and remember all you've done for us, so that when we celebrate Easter, we can shout, Praise God!" Amen.