

Sermons at Oak Grove

February 3, 2008

Matthew 17:1-9

“To Be Transformed”

By Andries J Coetzee

Today’s text concludes the celebration of Epiphany, which the theologian Fred Craddock describes as a time when the whisper of the baby Jesus in Bethlehem becomes a shout heard around the world. The text also ushers us to Ash Wednesday, in which we remember our own mortality, and is the sobering beginning of Lent, as we begin to follow Jesus on his way to Jerusalem, a journey that will take us to Easter.

Here at Oak Grove our Lenten journey will begin on this coming Wednesday, February 6 at 7:00 p.m., with a contemplative worship service including communion and the imposition of ashes. Starting the next week, we will also join one another around the dinner tables of Gideon Pond Hall each Wednesday evening in Lent for a brief time of prayer as we *Create A Life With God* with different prayer practices each week.

In all honesty I must admit that the sacrilegious side of me does protest that I have to create this life with God, during the season of lent, with only soup for supper on a Wednesday night.

Chris Lockley¹ wrote “that the last thing the world needs is miserable, grim, life-denying Christians – yet that is the impression many have. And Lent doesn’t help this observation, with its overly serious and sometimes pietistic message of self-denial and discipline.”

What he suggests is a re-interpretation of Lent for our current context. “After all, there’s really nothing sacred about Lent, or any liturgical season. You won’t find the word “Lent” anywhere in the Bible. “Thou shalt deny thyself in Lent” can be found nowhere in the Commandments.

¹ Lockley, Chris: <http://www.mncuca.org.au/mission.html>)

Lent is as open to contextual re-interpretation as any of our traditions. So therefore Lockley, encourages a Lenten discipline that embraces life rather than denying it. After all, *Lent* comes from the Old English word “*lencten*”, referring to the lengthening of days following winter – i.e., Spring, a time of renewal of life.

Concentrating on a negative action – “giving up” – gives the attitude, behavior or object we’re trying to overcome more power and energy. It becomes the center of our thinking and draws our awareness to itself. The very act of giving attention to giving up something can make it nearly impossible to do so. Just ask someone who struggles with an addiction. If we’re giving our attention and energy to taking up something positive, encouraging, joyful or challenging, the negative behaviors and objects will consequently find less room in our lives. Therefore let us allow something new to emerge in our lives during this season of Lent.

What I suggest we take on for Lent, as a Congregation, is to fully participate in the process of discernment set before us during this Interim Time. Within the next months every active member of Oak Grove will receive a survey in the mail asking your opinion, covering all areas of our life together as a Congregation. Your participation in the process will be very important as the information will be used to determine our Vision and Mission as a Congregation and subsequently, the leadership we need to help us reach the fulfillment of such.

To define ourselves and shape our vision for the future of Oak Grove will require more, however, than just filling in an inventory. It requires active participation in the life of this community and a willingness to meet the task set before us....a willingness that you have proven these past four months. This coming week we will start a new meeting schedule for our committees There are two ways to approach this change; to see it as a giving up of the way things used to be or it can be seen as an opportunity to improve communication among committees, encourage more and different leadership, and promote better stewardship of our facility.

We as a Congregation are facing a turning point in our life together, like so many times before in the history of this community. We are in the midst of a defining point as we discern what we are about as a Community of God.

For Jesus the Transfiguration was a turning point, like this, in his life. The transfiguration experience moved him, shaped him, and ultimately carried him to his destiny of death on a cross, but even more to an empty grave, as he triumphed in Resurrection and Ascension.

The vision Jesus received was how God will finally bring freedom and salvation to the world; by becoming one of us! This is the vision by which we are addressed today and which takes us on our Lenten journey. This is a vision which sparks and crackles like a live wire -- full of the current of God's saving mission in the world.

We are the body of Christ. His transfiguration vision points to ours, here in this life -- sometimes through seeing powerfully such revelations of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; sometimes by tasting that glory in his body and blood offered to us at this table set before us; sometimes by hearing the word spoken and our minds and hearts igniting with the glory of it, and sometimes by touching or being touched with a mercy and strength we did not know we had or could receive. But his transfiguration, and ours in such moments of witness, is not for himself or for us -- but for the sake of God's mission.²

To catch this transfiguration mission of Jesus is to catch something of his own passion for the sick, the outcast, the insignificant. It is to see our world in a new way, seeing with God's own eyes what needs to be done and being moved to act under the power of God, on God's behalf. We are called to notice all who are assaulted by the tragic, all who suffer and ask where God is, all who see suffering and wonder why.

For us as a Congregation and individuals, to go with Jesus through Lent means being set free by his cross and resurrection to do more with our lives than

² The General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church, PO Box 340003, Nashville TN 37203-0003. Worship website: www.umcworship.org.

preserve them. It means the freedom to offer ourselves to the service of God's reign and mission, no matter what the cost.

The promise of the Transfiguration is that this journey with Jesus is not without suffering, but we know that the glorious victory of the resurrection awaits us on Easter Morning.

AMEN