

Transfiguration of our Lord

March 6, 2011

Exodus 24:12–18

Psalm 2

2 Peter 1:16–21

Matthew 17:1–9

Year A

I.N.I.

Today, on the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord, we are making connections. What is revealed through God's Word is intended to make the hearer go, "aha, now I see!" "Okay, I think I'm getting it."

In the very basic puzzle "connect the dots," if you follow the numbers correctly you see something that before you went from one to two to three, etc. was hidden. Once you complete the connection, the picture of a dog or a kite comes to life.

I admit to being a little directionally challenged. At this stage in my life and my ministry, and still arguing that I am new to New Haven, I survive driving a car thanks to my handy-dandy GPS, which stands for Global Positioning System. How do these devices (and applications on smartphones) work? On a very little screen that you can mount to a windshield (unless it's already built-in to your car), the maps and the voice emanating from a speaker guide you to various destinations. Last week it on one day it took me to a breakfast meeting at Lena's in Westville, then to St. Raphael's Hospital, then to my car getting serviced in Hamden, then to visits at Elim Park in Cheshire, then to an evening appointment in Trumbull. When you turn on the GPS, it sends out signals to satellites that have collected data on maps, and in a matter of seconds it establishes what is called "satellite connection." Once it does, your screen appears live and in living color with the street you are on, and the direction your car is going. The rather pleasant voice says things like "turn left in two miles," "keep right," and "arriving at destination on right!" I really think that a GPS is a grown-up game of connecting the dots, where you start in one place, and following the sequence of routes and roads, your destination is finally revealed!

Way before GPS's were invented, the place to find your way with God was high up on a mountain. On a mountain, you can gain a new perspective when down below your vision is limited. Also for the ancients, up was always nearer to God, and mountains were about as high up as you could go.

So today we have both Moses up on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandment in Exodus, and Jesus up on the mountain, just like Moses.

If you read the entire Gospel of Matthew and are playing "connect the dots" (or require an exegetical GPS, as the case may be), you would certainly discover that Jesus is

portrayed as a new Moses. He goes up one mountain already in chapter 5 to offer his Sermon--on the Mount, and ups the ante on Moses by saying things like "you have heard it said" (referring to the law given by God through Moses) but "I say to you" (referring to the new law given by God through Jesus). In fact, scholars who act in part to help us make connections have helpfully suggested that the entire structure of the Gospel of Matthew is in five parts, like the Torah, like the first five books of the Bible, which are commonly referred to as the Books of Moses. Are you getting any of this?

Now, today, in chapter 17, in the fourth book or fourth part of Matthew, Jesus, who is like a new Moses, takes Peter and James and John high up on a mountain like Moses taking Joshua high up the mountain. There is the numeric connection to the Exodus story in it being "six days later."

In that moment, on that mountain, the bright cloud representing the very glory of God appears! In that moment, on that mountain, Jesus is changed and the glory of God emanates from him! In that moment, on that mountain, Jesus confers with Moses and Elijah, the epitome of God's messengers connecting the Law and the Prophets.

While Peter scrambles for his camera...I mean a way to capture the moment, the voice from the cloud makes the pronouncement that echoes back to Jesus' baptism, another Epiphany, as if we and the disciples need to hear it again, that Jesus is not just a new Moses, or a even a new prophet with a new world order, but the very Son of God. "Aha, now I see." "Okay, I think I'm getting it."

Up on our mountain, here after six days, today on the seventh, we are invited to consider God's glory revealed in Jesus. With the disciples, we can be dazzled by sights and sounds and connections that overwhelm us as we sing a hymn, as we share communion with friends we also call brothers and sisters in Christ, as we pray for peace in Africa and the Middle East, for continued stability in New Zealand and Haiti, for our own recognition of glory and a new path to life with God, as our past is brought to mind with our present, and our future lies ahead.

Today, as we share time and space on a Feast in the church, we might be changed into those who have good news to tell, about the ways God is prompting us into ways of holy living, seeking Christ in one another, sharing glory and love for friends and newcomers alike.

Standing on this mountain, we look ahead to the forty days of Lent that are ahead, and like Peter, James, and John are invited to look at the whole picture of God's story. Coming down, to days in between glory, to days in between Sunday mornings, we may discover and share God's nearness as we carry the light of Christ into the dark places of suffering and death, of drudgery and challenge, and there pronounce a way of new life.

I.N.I.