

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

February 19, 2023

ALONE

when solitude and presence meet

by Drew Downs

At the Transfiguration, a few disciples see Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus. Then, when they blink, Jesus is alone.

This reminds me that Jesus is never alone. And I do mean literally. At one point, he'd spent **days** trying to get five minutes to himself.

I also mean it metaphysically. After all, he is part of the Trinity.

On the cross, in one account, he names aloneness, however. A potential slip into fear, perhaps?

It reminds me of my own seeking of solitude and the literal desire for alone time. But also how people I love are always with me; even those I'll never see again. And I think about how God is with me, even without feeling a presence. Even in solitude, being alone is never truly necessary.

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

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WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Getting Us

If you watched the Super Bowl last Sunday, you may have seen an advertisement for Jesus. At a time when we're inundated with ads for beer, celebrity cameos, or feel-good ads for soap, it was pretty odd to see an ad about...humanity, division, and suffering. One that wraps with the suggestion that Jesus gets us.

There was something odd to seeing the ad. And there was something odd in seeing the response from people.

Many appreciated the moment for its contrast with consumerism. Or thought the message was a great sermon. While others suggested that Christians shouldn't spend \$20 million on one advertisement. Or pointed to the people who funded the ad: individuals and groups who have supported public and private policies which harm minority groups.

The ad did get a lot of people talking. And, I suspect, a lot more thinking.

I myself am ambivalent. For more reasons than this space affords. But what I wanted to share with you is this: it felt like half the sermon. Like Good Friday without Easter. Because the hope of Christ doesn't simply bring the end of division or suffering. It brings liberation.

Our problem is not *only* that people are angry. Jesus reminds us that justice and peace are necessarily intertwined. Which means we need more than an end to division.

With love,
Drew

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FOR SUNDAY

The Last Sunday After the Epiphany

February 19, 2023

Collect

O God, who before the passion of your only begotten Son revealed his glory upon the holy mountain: Grant to us that we, beholding by faith the light of his countenance, may be strengthened to bear our cross, and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Reflection

What do you suppose these three disciples expected when they climbed that mountain with Jesus? What did they think they would see?

The most obvious answer is: I don't know, but I know it's not this!

Spiritual seekers have climbed mountains to find the divine for millennia. It is also where we expect to find our gurus, busy communing with the divine. Moses famously did it multiple times. So if we want to find someone who knows anything about the divine, that's usually where we look for them.

Students also follow their teachers where *they* go. So, if the teachers walks up the mountain and invites you to join him, well, you usually go.

I suspect that these disciples expected something special for them. Something the rest of the disciples weren't supposed to have. Maybe they felt that made them special. Or that Jesus recognized something special *in them*. It is an honor to receive such special wisdom.

And yet I doubt that Jesus sought to honor them as much as teach them. This seems particularly true of Peter, who, in one breath, proclaims deep truth, and in the other, misunderstanding.

Peter, once again misses the point. He wants to memorialize the moment or capture it. But he also declares the moment "good." Which, I think we're prone to overlook. For it is Peter's exuberance that leads him to miss the mark. But it also what allows him to see a profound truth. To name this moment what God will affirm.

That it is good for them to be there. As it is good for us to be here. Listening to God's beloved.

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