

A SERMON BY THE REVEREND ELIZABETH B. GARDNER

The Last Sunday after Epiphany (B)



11 February 2018

2 Kings 2:1-12
2 Corinthian 4:3-6
Mark 9: 2-9
Psalm 50: 1-6

First, a disclaimer. This might seem like a long introduction to a short sermon. If you plan on reading the announcements or checking your email or looking for your favorite hymn during the sermon, now would be the time. The real message is going to come in minute.

First, I want to tell you I'm preaching today on the Collect. As you may already know, we pray two Collects every Sunday at Christ Church. We pray the Collect for Purity - which, as I understand it, was a prayer initially intended first for the clergy to collect our hearts and minds to focus on the privilege of leading friends and family of the parish in worship.

We pray the **Collect for Purity** - which, as I understand it, was a prayer initially intended first for the clergy to collect our hearts and minds to focus on the privilege of leading friends and family of the parish in worship.

We also pray the **Collect of the Day** to collect all of us together for what is a time set apart to worship God and remind ourselves of God's love and sacrifice for us.

All of our collects more or less **fit a pattern** developed, and some would say perfected, by Archbishop Cranmer in the first Book of Common Prayer (1549).¹ The form is actually quite simple. There is an **address to God** and to his character or actions in the world on our behalf (1). There is a **request** - usually based on Scripture (2). Then there is an **invocation and doxology** (3). And finally is **The Amen** (4) which is the fancy church word for *So Be It or I Agree!* I like it because I look at the Collect of the Day as a kind of roadmap of where the service is going to go.

The Second thing I want to mention before I get to the message of the sermon, is...

I've either been influenced by the Super Bowl last weekend or the Olympics opening this weekend but I feel like we need a pre-Lent pep talk. They say preachers really just preach sermons to themselves so I apologize if today's message is something only I need to hear - but I don't think it is. You see, we are at a crossroads today. This is the **last Sunday after the Epiphany**. I don't

know about you but January 6 seems like a very long time ago. In truth it has only been 5 short weeks. And Wednesday we begin Lent.

So we are still being charged to take God's message of love and forgiveness into the world and...in a few short days we will walk on a journey to when our Savior was betrayed, arrested, beaten, tortured and eventually killed for that very same love and forgiveness. **That is what makes this Sunday so important.**

This week we realize we must open ourselves to the idea that we can hold both - that goodness of God's love and that sorrow of man's fear - and somehow be transformed in the process. **That is why all of our readings for today tell us about how God reveals His faithfulness and presence to the point of transformation.**

In today's Scripture there are so many wonderful phrases we could latch onto and explore more deeply. From Second Kings Elisha's powerful promise to Elijah: **"As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you."** From our psalm: **"Out of Zion, perfect in its beauty, God reveals himself in glory."** From Paul's letter to the problem children in Corinth: **"For it is God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness.'" And from Mark's gospel: "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here."**

Over and over again, through our prayers, our hymns, our readings - indeed our entire worship service today - we are to remember God's transformative love shines in and through us and never leaves.

Ok, so now the real message. You can put away your phone now.

Our Collect today has a tiny, little phrase in it that, I think, means everything. Let's hear it again:

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.

"...and be changed into his likeness from glory to glory."

And here is your pre-Lent pep-talk:

From glory to glory means you already are glory. I love the Hebrew language because there are a lot of words for glory - some mean what you already know: majesty, honor, beauty, excellence. But there is another word for glory ² that also includes: foolishness, rage, mad.

Which ever way glory applies to you and your life, the message I want to share with you today - and the message I want you to take home with you - is:

You are Glory.

You are majesty.

You are honorable.

You are beauty.

You may also be foolish.

And mad.

And rage from time to time.

Because you are glory.

And that is important because in Lent we tend to look for all the ways we are NOT deserving of God's grace. Now this may seem a little anti-religious but I want to suggest another way to enter into Lent this year.

Pray about this between now and Wednesday. Our prayer book tells us to enter into a holy Lent this way:

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.

Now there is a lot that comes before that including the words "notorious sins". **And I want to be clear, Those sins which shackle our hearts and souls should not be ignored.** They separate us from God. They separate us from one another. And steps should be taken to find redemption and forgiveness. But if your heart and mind and soul are cluttered with messages of self-doubt, and inadequacy, and insecurity, and pain...then you will never be able to address those deeper, darker sins that are the real crux of why your relationship with Jesus is not what it could be.

So I offer a different way to think about Lent this year.

You should pray. Pray for understanding that the God who made you loves you. Pray for Jesus's love to come into your heart. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work through you.

You should fast. Stop listening to the haters. Stop listening to the media. Stop listening to the voices that tell you you're not enough - especially if they come from you.

You should deny yourself. Give up believing you don't look beautiful or handsome enough. Give up believing you don't own enough or make enough or do enough. Give up believing you aren't smart enough or strong enough.

So when you're invited to pray this Lent: pray to renew your relationship with God. When you're invited to fast: eliminate the voices that tell you you're enough. When you're invited to self-denial: deny yourself those people or things or channels that prevent you from being the person God wants you to be.

Today is the day in the church year we honor transformation. We hear stories of God's actions through history changing hearts and minds to know and love him. We pray prayers that remind us of God's transforming love and sacrifice. And we are reminded that to be changed into God's likeness means going from Glory to Glory. Consider what it means to know, to really believe, you and everyone you encounter is a beloved child of God.

Be open to the transformation that comes with that knowledge. It might not be easy... But it could be glorious.

Amen.



CHRIST CHURCH GEORGETON

31st and O Streets, NW
Washington, DC 20007 | 202.333.6677
www.christchurchgeorgetown.org
info@christchurchgeorgetown.org

The Rev. Timothy A. R. Cole, Rector
The Rev. Elizabeth F. Keeler, Asst. to the Rector
The Rev. Elizabeth B. Gardner, Asst. to the Rector
The Rev. Nicholas J. Evancho, Deacon & Seminarian