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St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
Last Sunday after the Epiphany/Year B
February 11, 2018
Text: Mark 9:2-9

The story of the Transfiguration is a pivotal moment in Mark's Gospel. The Transfiguration marks the end of Galilean ministry where the majority of Jesus' ministry takes place. From the mountaintop, Jesus and his disciples are headed toward Jerusalem where Jesus will suffer and die and be raised again. The Transfiguration is a pivotal moment for us as we end the season of Epiphany and stand on the cusp of the Lenten season. Like Jesus and his disciples we also turn our faces toward Good Friday and to Easter.

But that is getting ahead of ourselves. So today we are placed on the mountain for the ultimate mountaintop experience. And this is one of those stories that paints a vivid picture in our minds. One that literally takes our breath away. An experience that, in some form or fashion, we hope to have within our own lifetimes. An experience that says: WOW!

So we are here and although we cannot and should not dwell here long enough to build dwellings as Peter suggested, we need to dwell here long enough to focus our minds on this event and take it in.

It is important that we look at what has transpired before. Immediately prior to this passage are a series of passages that focus on the question of Jesus' identity. We have had demons naming him as "the Holy One of God" and as "the Son of God" and "Son of the Most High God" but everyone else is confused and unsure of who this Jesus of Nazareth is. Then a little later in Mark's Gospel we have that powerful moment in the eighth chapter when Jesus and his disciples are on their way to the villages of Caesarea Philippi and Jesus asks: "*Who do people say that I am?*" And they respond saying that some think that he is John the Baptist, others think he is Elijah, and still others one of the many other prophets. And Jesus finally asks: But you, who do YOU say that I am? And Peter answered him, "*You are the Messiah.*"

Six days later, Mark says today, Peter, James, and John follow Jesus up to a high mountain apart from everyone else, and there they experienced a vision unlike any other—a WOW moment, one that they would remember for the rest of their

lives. Jesus stands before them changed, transfigured, his clothes a dazzling white. And it is up on the mountaintop where the Transfiguration continues to explore the question that has been put before others during the season of Epiphany: Who is Jesus? Who is this guy who calls people to leave the lives they know behind and follow him? Some leave everything-their families. Their nets and boats, their father and hired hands. Tax booth. Livelihoods. Everything! Who does that? Who is this guy who teaches with authority in ways that none have ever heard before? Who is this guy who baffles even the most learned Pharisees and scribes? Who is this Man from Galilee who silences demons? Raises the sick from their sick beds? The dead from their death beds? Who is this guy who heals lepers and tells a paralyzed man to stand up and take his mat and walk? Who is this man who calms the wind and the waves? Who is this man who can with only five loaves and two fish, fill the bellies of thousands? Who is he?

On the mountaintop, we learn much about Jesus' identity, and the answer to all those questions.

Whatever Peter, James, and John were expecting as they made that climb upward, Transfiguration was not it. And certainly not in the presence of Moses and Elijah, the two greatest prophets who ever lived. Moses who represented the law and Elijah representing the prophets. Peter, James, and John were witnessing the linkage of the Old and the New; something that Jesus reiterated over and over again in his teaching especially as we hear it said in Matthew's Gospel. *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill (Mt. 5:17).* By seeing Jesus in the midst of Moses and Elijah, the Transfiguration made a clear statement that part of Jesus' identity is on par with these two leaders. And the only one that anyone ever expected to be on par with Moses and Elijah was the One long promised, the Messiah. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets.

On the Last Sunday of Epiphany we not only hear the wonderful story of Transfiguration but we hear one more clue to the question of Jesus' identity-a "bookend" to the season of light and theophanies, and revelations. We hear the same answer repeated on the top of the mountain that we heard at the beginning and at the River Jordan when Jesus emerged from the waters of his baptism: *"This is my Son, the Beloved."*

As we descend from the mountaintop today (like Peter, we can't stay there) and journey toward Jerusalem with Jesus and his companions, as we leave this season and begin our journey on Ash Wednesday and travel through Lent to

Easter, we get the clearest picture yet of who Jesus was and is. A picture made clearer on the cross of Calvary and in an empty tomb.

Generations later, the question of Jesus' identity is still before us. The season of Epiphany has illuminated some of the answers but Jesus' questions remain the same for each and every one of us post-dazzling clothes and conversing prophets. Jesus continues to ask: *Who do people say that I am? Who do YOU say that I am?*

Indeed, are you able to voice like Peter that he is the Messiah? Are you able to say with the Voice from heaven that Jesus is the beloved Son of God? And what will you do with "*this is my Son, the Beloved*" once you realize these are God's words for you?

Who is Jesus for you? Who is he for the world?

Let us walk with him on the journey through Lent and see. Amen.