

Last Sunday After Epiphany, February 15, 2015 Year B

Saint Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Rector

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:16-19, Mark 9:2-9

"Be An Eyewitness"

Every one of us has been an eyewitness to something remarkable that happened – and we can remember the details like it was yesterday. I would venture to say that there are quite a few here today who remember where they were and what they were doing on November 22, 1963, when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. You might even remember that Sunday, watching TV when Jack Ruby pulled a gun and killed Lee Harvey Oswald; Black and white memories to be sure! We got to see remarkable things like four lads from Liverpool who would capture the hearts and minds of America at a time when they needed it most – to heal the hole in their hearts from the assassination of their beloved president.

The Telstar satellite made it possible for trans-Atlantic broadcasts to become a reality and you could actually see what was happening live in London on a TV in New York. I remember these things, and it is so amazing what has taken place from the early 60's up until today – when you can text someone in Africa, or you can see a video online of something that took place in Czechoslovakia. Talk about mindboggling! Can you remember sitting and watching man set foot on the moon for the very first time?

And then I wonder how many of us remember watching the announcement of the end of the Vietnam War, or the resignation speech by President Richard Nixon? Do you remember what you were doing when you saw that a Beatle – John Lennon, had been gunned down in front of his apartment building? Or the football hero who the world watched driving a white Ford Bronco for what seemed like hours, being pursued by the Los Angeles Police? Remember how a stunned America was glued to their TV's watching the destruction of the World Trade Center and the many lives lost on September 11, 2001. In each of these events it was as if we were right there, as eyewitnesses to the news.

We had the benefit of the wonders of technology but the Apostles never had any such luxury. They witnessed some extraordinary events but the only record of them is whatever was written down or told to someone else. From the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, Our Lord showed the Apostles what God was doing right before their very eyes, and many times it was not what they were expecting. Just before today's Holy Gospel, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks His disciples "**Who do people say that I am?**" (Mark 8:27) Jesus then asks "**Who do YOU say that I am?**" It was Peter who had the God given insight to answer "*You are the Christ!*" The Greek word for Christ **χριστός** (Christos) means anointed one or Messiah. Matthew's Gospel has Simon Peter saying "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" (Matthew 16:16) When Peter spoke this to Jesus he most likely called Him "*Yeshua Ha Mashiach,*" which translated meant Jesus the Christ or Jesus the Messiah. Christ was not Jesus' last name but was the title that equated to His identity. The Apostle Paul will often refer to Him as Christ Jesus or Messiah Jesus. Based on all that they had seen up to this point, the miracles that healed peoples' diseases, the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand, the calming of the storm, Jesus walking on the water and more – they were starting to put it together – but they still had questions. It was not until the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost that doubt was removed from their minds.

What Peter, James and John would experience on a mountain near Caesarea Philippi would let them know that Simon Peter's words were indeed truth! It probably took place on nearby Mount Hermon, which is just north of Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus took His three trusted disciples to be eyewitnesses to the news of His true identity. Jesus would reveal to them not only who He was, but what He had come to do! They would see that Jesus had come to continue and complete the tasks of the great Prophet Elijah, and of the one who would be there as well, the greatest prophet of old, Moses. They appear on that mountain alongside Jesus, who is shining. *"His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them."* (Mark 9:3) Luke's Gospel describes the event this way *"As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning."* *"Two men, Moses and Elijah,"* *"appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem."* (Luke 9:29-31) The key phrase is "glorious" which describes that Jesus, Moses and Elijah are in the Glory of God – and so they shine! Yes, the three Apostles saw Jesus' face change to His face as the heavenly Son of God, but the fact that Moses and Elijah were shining as well indicates that there is something more here for us to learn.

In the presence of God the Father, whose voice will be audibly heard, Jesus, Moses, and Elijah are so caught up in the love, power, and the Kingdom of God that it transforms them with shining light. Jesus is not just telling parables to His apostles about the Kingdom of God and what it is like – here He is showing them! The three apostles are seeing something that only up to this point was only seen by Moses – and he glowed. Listen to these words from Exodus 34:29 *"And it came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him."* The effect of Glory of God was visible to others by the glowing of his face! Now it was happening on that mountain with Elijah as well.

And the voice of God the Father was heard from out of a cloud, saying *"This is My Son whom I love, listen to Him!"* (Mark 9:7) First, did you notice the cloud formed? Do you remember how God led the Israelites by cloud: *"And the LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night."* (Exodus 13:21) The Lord God was showing them signs that He had used before – for Peter, James and John to make the connection with God leading His people from the bondage of Egypt – and to recognize that they too were going to be freed from bondage – this time the bondage of sin and death. The voice of God the Father, which was heard at Jesus' Baptism, was now saying that what Jesus has been telling them is Truth – and that they needed to listen to Him. The sight of Moses and Elijah, when these words are spoken, illustrates that they have been extremely important in preparing the way "so far" – but that Jesus would finish the job! My dear friends - Jesus is the fulfillment of both the Law and the Prophets; Moses symbolizing the Law and Elijah symbolizing the prophets. In seeing them glowing radiantly, and hearing God the Father's voice the Apostles were given the hope that

through listening to and following Jesus – they too would share in God’s glory – the glory that knows no darkness, only light – for all eternity. And that same promise is there for us as well – knowing Jesus, listening to His Words, and obeying His commands is all we need - to receive the glory that can only come from Almighty God!

Jesus gives them orders not to reveal what they have seen “*until the Son of Man rose from the dead.*” (Mark 9:9) This must have puzzled them! Jewish thought at the time was that resurrection would happen to the righteous at the end of time. Do you remember in John’s Gospel when Lazarus died, his sister Martha came to Jesus and said that if He had been there her brother would not have died? Jesus said to her, “*Your brother shall rise again.*” *Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.”* (John 11:23-24) They did not think that resurrection would happen to one person before any of the others. Can you imagine how these three former fishermen were trying to process what they had just seen and heard, let alone try to report back to the others of their “eyewitness news?” Of course we know that Peter in his confusion wanted to build three tabernacles – or tents – to honor Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Processing all of this was something that would not make complete sense until much, much later – until after Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended to the Father. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon them, only then was Peter able to openly proclaim the Truth about Jesus of Nazareth. He stood that day and preached about Jesus, making the clear connection for all who could hear “*Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.*” (Acts 2:36) Peter had told Jesus at Caesarea Philippi that He was the Christ, but **now He was telling that to the whole world!** He called upon them to “*Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” (Acts 2:38) Three thousand souls came into the community of believers that day! Ironically that is the exact number that was slain after Moses came down the mountain and the golden calf was being worshipped – three thousand souls. Peter understood the importance of everything he saw and learned during his time with Jesus, and he makes that clear in the beginning of his second Epistle.

In today’s epistle reading from Peter, he wants to set the record straight, later in his life, that the extraordinary events that were being told about Jesus were true. He wrote this in addressing the doubters: “*For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.*” (2 Peter 1:16-19)

In effect, Peter is stating that he and the other apostle’s eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry, life, death and resurrection has allowed them to look back on the entire work of Biblical prophecy, in fact, on the entire Bible from the very beginning, and see that it all made sense. Peter sees

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that the Bible is filled with signs pointing to Jesus, as the long promised Messiah, and that on that mountain - God's own Words confirm that truth – or as Peter says “*made more sure.*”

At the end of today's reading, in verse 19, Peter encourages all of us to hold on to the words of Scripture as if we are people clinging to a bright lamp in the darkest part of the night, until the day when Jesus returns. When Jesus returns He will do so as the bright morning star, ready to usher in the “*great day of the Lord*” that the prophets Zephaniah and Joel spoke of (Zephaniah 1:14) (Joel 2:11). We have to be patient, for as Jesus said “*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.*” (Matthew 24:36) On that day – believers of Jesus Christ will share in the glory that was seen on that mountain by Peter, James and John – the glory that bathed Moses and Elijah in the presence of Almighty God.

In the two verses immediately following today's reading, Peter affirms that his eyewitness of the prophecy fulfilled is and could only be from God Himself, and that none of it was man-made – but was inspired by the Holy Spirit. “*But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*” (2 Peter 1:20-21)

Critics and detractors will try as hard as they can, but the fact remains that there was no conspiracy to make up “nice stories,” but the transformation that took place in each of the apostles, each of the eyewitnesses - to the life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was so remarkable that it could have only been done by the hand of God – as evidence of the Truth of His Son, the Word of God Incarnate and the written Word of God – the Holy Scriptures.

You've got to read it to believe it! Be an eyewitness!