

February 14, 2021 (Focus: Mark 9:2-9; Transfiguration Sunday; day after Trump acquittal)

After the events in DC yesterday, I don't know if I can hear the good news, at least not just yet.

With the events in DC yesterday at the impeachment trial, where those who admit someone was guilty of a serious crime would not convict him and bring him to justice, I was reminded that sometimes the biggest challenges to our faith are not doubts about God, but rather doubts about humanity. Are we at heart good? Is our true nature good or evil? If this is how we are when religion is at least given lip service to, how would we be without religion?

Usually on this Sunday before the season of Lent begins we would read the gospel story of Jesus accompanied by a few of his disciples up on the mountaintop, the transcendent Jesus awash in the glow of heavenly radiance, standing tall in the spirit of the prophets Moses and Elijah. But instead of being on the mountaintop awash in Jesus' radiance, I think many of us feel stuck in the swamp, awash in the dregs of what some would call leadership. We feel in the pit, not on the mountaintop but in a dark valley where hides the cowards. For far too long we have stood awash not in divine radiance but in the shadows of hypocrisy, immorality and unethical choices. We have stood awash in the systematization of racism, misogyny, xenophobia,...the ugliest of humanity. We have stood awash in the shadows of those who chose power and position over principle and ethics. We have stood awash in the shadows of those who have decided it is okay to live under two sets of rules: one for whites and one for people of color, one for men and one for women, one for those native born and one for the immigrant, one for the rich and one for the poor, one for the cisgendered and one for the LGBTQ. We have stood awash in these shadows for far too long, yet we see now that we are forced to stand in these shadows for longer at least a while longer.

We pray "on earth as it is in heaven..." yet we remember the actions of yesterday, of January 6, of the rally in Charlotte and the killing of black men and women on the streets of too many cities over too many years, and we wonder, can it ever truly be "on earth as it is in heaven..."? Can there be good news for us today, or any day, when for so many there is very little in the way of good news ever?

But then, we force ourselves to remember that evil actions left unchecked and evil actions condoned do not mean that evil triumphs over good. We have heard much in the last few weeks about the use of the word “fight”; we need to remember that when it comes to the fight between evil and good, one battle does not decide the war.

It may be difficult to imagine this right now given the weather outside, but soon we will be able to get out for nice walks. I, like many of you, like to go out hiking in the woods. I like those moments when you get to the point where you are far enough away from roads and other aspects of so-called civilization that you hear only the sounds of nature: a bird call, the rustle of leaves, the sound of a woodland creature scampering over the pine needle covered forest floor. When one walks such forest paths, something there are obstacles that get in our way. Things are thrown across the path. Sometimes these obstacles in our way are just part of nature, just part of the ebb and flow of life, like a old decaying tree that falls across the path, or like snow cover obscuring the path, or like rain falling on us as we trek making the way too slippery to navigate. And sometimes the barrier in our path is placed by others: someone covers the path so that they can get ahead of us, gaining the advantage. Sometimes someone changes the path markings to set us off on the wrong course, simply because they can. And this is true for our walk of life as well.

In the face of whatever is thrown in our way, in the way of justice and righteousness, we need to be resilient, we need to stay on the right path, we need to continue past/over/around any obstacles on in the journey of life and faith we are called to take. We can be stalwart, we can be steadfast, in the face of whatever is thrown in our way, because we know that God is steadfast. Yes, sometimes the sense that things truly can be on earth as they are in heaven wavers in us. Sometimes we have doubts whether peace, love, respect, and understanding for all people and all creation are possible. We see that our Constitutional system is only as good as the people who lead it and we wonder whether it can stand. But it reminds us that our faith is only as good as the people who live it, and so we are challenged. We are challenged yet again to pursue justice for all, even when we know the deck is stacked against all those but the rich and powerful. We are challenged yet again to demand righteousness, that is to demand fairness and equity for all, even when corruption is the status quo. We are challenged to remember that the arc of justice may be long, but the

only ones that can shorten that arc are those of us who stand with the poor, the oppressed, the person of color, the other.

We can be steadfast and stalwart in the fight for justice and peace because we know that God is steadfast. We can be steadfast in loving our neighbors, all our neighbors, because we know that God is love and God loves us and all our neighbors and all creation. And because I believe this to be true, I can now hear the good news again and believe it and be nourished by it and encouraged by it.

Psalm 25: 1-10, 20-22

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul, O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me. Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees...

O guard my life, and deliver me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you. May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you. Redeem us, O God, out of all our troubles.

Matthew 17:1-7

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."

May you feel fed and renewed and encouraged by the good news. No matter what is going on in the shadows, among the dregs, in the swamp, may we be bathed in the radiance of divine light, and may it guide us to roll up our sleeves and get back to work, to tend to our ministry and mission among all God's people and for God's creation, and let us do so in hope and faith.

Amen.

Gracious and loving God, we bring to this time our whole selves. We bring our joys and concerns, we bring our doubts and desires, we bring our deepest sense of hope to this time. We are grateful for this encounter of the holy, for this sense that we breathe in your spirit, we become one with your spirit, and our spirits are refreshed and renewed. Awaken our soul's eye to seek such glimpses of the holy in our daily lives; we suspect you are with us, as your steadfast love endures forever, so can endure and make new even such a time as this.

We need your Spirit moving in and among us, for many of us are discouraged by events in the world. Many of us are worried by the snow and cold further limiting our movements and activities. Pour down your spirit especially on those who struggle in discerning truth and the right way to live and the right decisions to make. May we all learn that it is never too late to apologize and make amends. May we all learn that it is never too late to do the right thing.

Ever Gracious God, pour out your love and your healing powers upon us, and upon all those in need of healing in body, mind, and spirit. Grant all in need an experience of your renewing compassion and care, especially...

Bless all those who have lost loved ones to this virus plaguing us now. Bless all affected with compassion and a sense of hope, that soon our efforts will turn the corner on this pandemic.

Moment of silent meditation...

Gracious God, grant us peace in our minds and in our hearts, as we struggle with being citizens of the world and as we seek to be accountable to each other and all creation. We trust that you intend peace for us, for we have heard it in the words of our teacher and spiritual guide and savior, the one we call the Prince of Peace, who taught us to pray to you, saying, Our Father...