



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Last Sunday after Epiphany, Year B
February 11, 2018

[RCL] 2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9

2 Kings 2:1-12

“I will not leave you.”

Elisha repeats these words to his teacher three times before the Lord takes Elijah away in a whirlwind ascension to heaven. The scene is dramatic and majestic; Elijah parts a sea like Moses and becomes part of a tableau of fiery angelic figures, somewhat like Jesus in the Transfiguration centuries later. We might feel tempted to focus on the theater of this story, but the narrative itself illuminates some of the most grounded elements of human experience—life, death, companionship, loyalty, legacy.

“I will not leave you,” Elisha says to his master. When given the opportunity to stay behind or peel off, Elisha is resolute; he is making this journey toward death with his teacher, no matter what. In the final scene, Elijah expresses gratitude for Elisha’s loyalty by asking what he can do for Elisha before he dies. Elisha responds in a cryptic, but completely understandable way: “Leave me a double share of your spirit,” he asks. In other words, leave me part of yourself; allow me to carry on your legacy. Elijah agrees but warns him that it will not be easy.

- Have you ever lost a loved one or been with someone toward the end of life?
- What are some of the ways that you strive or struggle to carry on the legacies of those you admire and respect?

Psalm 50:1-6

The first part of Psalm 50 is a gathering call. God is preparing to judge the people and is calling all of heaven and earth to be witnesses. The word “judgment” always has an ominous tone, but these verses do not hint at how destructive (or glorious) God’s judgment will be; instead, the focus is on the power and reach of God’s voice. “The Lord...has *spoken*.” “Our God...will *not keep silent*.” “*He calls* the heavens and the earth.” We often think of prophets and teachers doing the work of ingathering, or preparing the way for God’s glory to be revealed, but the psalmist here imagines God in that role. God’s voice resounds across creation, inviting those who will bear witness as well as those who will be judged to come together.

- In what ways do you hear God speaking in your life?
- How do you hear the voice of God in the world today?

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

The season of Epiphany invites us to celebrate the in-breaking of God's light in a dark world. This passage in 2 Corinthians reminds us that seeking the light of Christ is a continual journey. While the powers-that-be of this world strive to "veil" or "blind" us from the good news, we are called to receive the light of Christ in our hearts and reflect that light back to creation. As Epiphany comes to a close and we prepare to enter the season of Lent, our focus shifts from a celebration of light to a reckoning with darkness. Still, the gift of God's light in our heart does not go away with the change of liturgical seasons; even as we begin this season of reflection and repentance, we carry God's light with us and rely upon it for hope and strength.

- When has it been hard to receive the light of Christ? When has it been easy?

Mark 9:2-9

In what ways do you see the light of Christ stifled or dimmed by the "god of this world"? How do you help shine the light of Christ on those experiencing dark or troubled times?

This passage in Mark (and similar passages in Matthew and Luke) tell the story of Jesus' transfiguration. As readers, we are drawn into a scene that is actually quite intimate—Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to a remote location where they alone witness a dazzling theophany and hear a definitive claim to Jesus' authority and status as the Son of God. If any of us had been present in that moment, we might have reacted like Peter, "terrified" and fumbling for something to say or do. Whether or not we have ever had our own vision of God, the story of the Transfiguration invites us to imagine what it is like to be in the fullness of God's presence. What would we do? What would we say? James and John are silent, but we can imagine that they are not indifferent; perhaps awe has left them speechless. The Transfiguration, while intimate, reveals a Jesus unlike the gentle, human teacher we have come to know in earlier passages. The Jesus of the Transfiguration may feel distant or fantastical to some, while others may be captured by the majesty, mystery, and beauty of God shown in this way.

- How do you experience God most fully?
- What images of Jesus draw you into the mystery and beauty of God?

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