

Sermon for Last Epiphany  
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Trinity on the Hill  
Los Alamos, New Mexico  
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2 Kings 2:1-12  
Psalm 50:1-6  
2 Corinthians 4:3-6  
Mark 9:2-9

At Last. We're nearly there. My favorite season – Lent.  
We get to strip away our pretenses and focus on moving ahead.

This is the Last Sunday after the Epiphany.  
We get to join Peter, James and John as they glimpse the Glory of God.

We get to see through their eyes the Transfiguration. Why?

The reason comes this Wednesday – Ash Wednesday, and it's spelled out in the Collect today:

“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.”

We need the reassurance of the Glory of God revealed in the transfigured face of Jesus to give us the strength to step into the wilderness of the next 40 days of Lent.  
Lent traditionally is a time of deprivation.

Just as Jesus left the Jordan after his Baptism by John and entered the wilderness to be tempted.  
Journeying into the wilderness is part of what is called the ascetic experience.

That's spelled A-S-C-E-T-I-C, which was a practice of paring away the vestiges of comfort to face the discomforts of the wilderness. In the early church these ascetics were the Desert Mothers and Fathers who became the spiritual leaders of the early church. They went to the desert to face their inner demons in the barren landscape with prayer and personal discipline.

That's how Lent developed as a spiritual practice, a time each year for Christians to pare away some of the comforts of life and enter a time in the spiritual wilderness, and to face our own mortality. That's why this Wednesday we will gather together to have ashes crossed onto our foreheads and to be told that we are but dust and to dust we shall return.

That's also why the readings today – the Last of the Epiphanies – show us the transfiguring power of the glory of God who emerged from three days in the tomb that Easter morning.

I remember a trip, back before Covid. I was anxious to return home. Unfortunately, my morning flight was delayed, and delayed, and delayed because of the snow and storms. When the plane finally left Dallas, I watched the sun fade out as we flew west into the growing darkness. I looked down but there was nothing but utter darkness. But then, every so often we'd fly over a small town where the lights gathered amidst the darkness to give light to the night.

In that sky, the darkness seemed to spread to the farthest reaches of the earth. There seemed no end to the enveloping darkness. But there were these small patches of brightness amidst the dark, small vestiges of the day that endured through the night to whisper the promise that the light would return no matter how dark the night might seem.

St. Paul was battling that inner darkness in the church he founded in Corinth. They did not understand the role of servanthood in the church. They preferred to lord it over each other and they even used the gifts of the spirit as clubs to beat each other into place. And Paul would not have it. The gifts are of one spirit, and you all are the body of Christ and each and every one of you are indispensable. And today we hear the words that put everyone and everything into proper perspective.

None of them matter, not the rich, not the poor, not the generous. It is all for nothing. The gifts of the spirit matter for nothing. The gifts of prophecy, power, prestige, all are nothing. Nothing! If there is not LOVE.

And how does Paul define love:

Love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoice in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. In short, Love is eternal. Only love lasts. Prophecies end, tongues are stilled, knowledge ends. But love never ends. We see in a mirror, dimly. And we see only that glimmer of the light of truth and love in our lives.

And as we sit in the darkness of this winter, and wait for the coming of Spring, let us pray for the light, holding onto the hope that our faith will sustain us, and that God's love will once again surround us with the light of God's truth.

That the Love of God for us,  
The Love of God around us,  
The Love of God within us,

The love of God we share with each other will fulfill the promise to each and every one of us. That love was revealed in the face of Jesus Christ that we might be given the strength to bear the crosses of our lives into the glory yet to come.

This reassurance was given us that we might proclaim, as it says in the Epistle today,

"Let light shine out of darkness,"  
who has shone in our hearts to give the light  
of the knowledge of the glory of God  
in the face of Jesus Christ.

Amen.