

Today is traditionally celebrated as Transfiguration Sunday. We've just heard the story of Jesus' Transfiguration on the mountain with three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John. While on the mountain, Moses and the prophet, Elijah, show up, and we hear the voice of God pronounce what was said at Jesus' baptism, "This is my son, the beloved." Mark, which should be no surprise to us by now, adds the imperative, "Listen to him!"

This is not an easy text from which to preach...I'm not going to lie, it has always been a struggle to make this literal mountain-top experience relevant for our lives of faith. The main attainable take-away in this text for me is that with the appearance of Moses and Elijah, and then their disappearance followed by the phrase, "...they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus," we are to glean that Jesus bears the essentials of what was contained in the Torah (the Law, personified by Moses), and in all the prophetic wisdom, (personified in Elijah).

The one who learns from the ways of Jesus will live a life wholly and completely in accordance with God's desire. In other words, Jesus is the only sustenance needed for our journey through life.

A story is told about the twentieth-century pilgrim, William McElwee Miller, which highlights the travel necessities required in our journey of becoming:

While travelling along the border of Iran and Afghanistan, Dr. Miller had encountered a Muslim sage. Together the missionary and the mullah rode

along the narrow path. In the course of their conversion the Persian asked the Presbyterian, "What is Christianity?" Dr. Miller said, It is like a journey. For that trip I need four things—

bread, for nourishment;
water, for refreshment;
a book, for direction, and
opportunity, for service.

These are my pilgrim fare. Jesus provided me with these things. I trust Jesus on my way. That is Christianity.

(from *The Holy Spirit and Christian Formation: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Diane J. Chandler, p99. Found in a Google search:

https://books.google.com/books?id=AzCuDQAAQBAJ&pg=PA99&lpg=PA99&dq=William+McElwee+Miller+bread+water&source=bl&ots=LEwjTWssob&sig=ACfU3U0vb-5epDOjyueo9i-ShoiAWJfNjw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewiC_cK6hdznAhUVVc0KHZjVD0sQ6AEwAXoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=William%20McElwee%20Miller%20bread%20water&f=false

Sounds pretty simple. Sounds like a nice way to pare down what's most important to God to something do-able. Observe Jesus' life, and do likewise! Right? "This is my beloved Child, listen(, follow, and do likewise)!"

Apparently, it wasn't so easy for the disciples. Our prescribed text today was the story of the Transfiguration and the conclusion of chapter 8 just before it, when Peter proclaims that Jesus is Christ, the Messiah, and Jesus affirms him for it. Then in the next breath Jesus tells them he must suffer and be put to death, and Peter scolds Jesus for saying such awful things, only to be told by Jesus that Peter is allowing the voice of Satan to desire the "easy" way...the less selfless way. Jesus goes on to explain the costly way of discipleship, and the

consequence of having to bear one's cross in order to follow Jesus. We are all like Peter. We would rather close our eyes to the cost of discipleship. We would rather close our eyes to the cost of discipleship.

Do you think the gospel-writer Mark understood this truth about us? I think so. Remember last week I talked about the purposeful placement of the unstopping of the *deaf* person's ears and the loosening of that person's *mute* tongue? Well, today I wanted to be sure that we heard the follow-up story to it of the *unblinding* of the eyes of the one who wanted to "see" Jesus. And I wanted to make sure that we read it in the context of what we've just talked about...Peter and his flip-flopping discipleship.

So let's back up to the beginning of the reading. The chapter begins with another feeding story - this time Jesus and the disciples feed 4000 people with seven baskets of bread and a few fish. Instead of twelve baskets being leftover, as with the 5000, there are seven baskets left. Here's where the beginning of our reading comes into play. Jesus and the Twelve get in a boat and head back across the Sea of Galilee for "the other side." One last visit with the outsiders. While they are **on their way**, they realize that they only have "one loaf" of bread. This is disturbing to them. Jesus offers a quick, out-of-the-air lesson about being wary of the "yeast" of the Herodians and Pharisees (ie. unhealthy influences), and the disciples think that he's connecting this talk of yeast with their forgetfulness and bringing just one loaf. **All the disciples can think**

about is their scarcity; about how they don't have enough. (Sound familiar, church?!?)

Jesus goes off!

“Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand?

Are your hearts hardened?

Do you have eyes, and fail to see?

Do you have ears, and fail to hear?

And do you not remember?

Then he reminds them of the 5000:

When I broke the five loaves, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?”

They said to him, “Twelve.”

Then of the 4000:

And the seven (loaves), how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?”

And they said to him, “Seven.”

Then he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

(OK, Jesus, I admit I still am not wholly positive about all these numbers you're throwing around.)

I'll give you an educated answer to this in a moment...feel free to listen to it if you're curious. But really the only one number you need to pay attention to comes at the end.

From theologian Ched Myers, et al:

The five loaves and twelve baskets left over in the first wilderness feeding represent the Jewish world (the books of Moses (5), the tribes of Israel (12)). The seven loaves and baskets left over in the second feeding symbolize the inclusion of the *Gentile* world (in Jewish numerology seven was the symbol of completion). To make this clear Mark even uses different terms for “basket”; the first feeding story uses a Jewish term and the second uses a Greek term.

Jesus crossing back and forth the Sea, including his encounter with the Syro-Phonician woman up north, has penetrated boundary after boundary until it has all been united by “one loaf” -- Jesus.

There is only “one loaf” around which the church is called to gather, and it symbolizes enough for everyone.

You see?

Do you see?

No, really, the gospel-writer, Mark, wants to know, do you see? The writer doesn't think so. At least not the first time around. Brilliantly--and just before the disciples are going to be asked if they see the Christ who has been standing right in front of them all this time--Mark plants this story of the healing of a blind person. And what is so rich about this story, is that the blind person doesn't see completely the first time Jesus lays hands (and saliva) on them. “I can see people,” the person says, “but they look like trees, walking.”

On the second attempt, the person sees clearly...and is told by Jesus not to reveal the miracle to the people in the village. ...Fat chance!

Seeing...and believing....takes time.

On the mountain of the transfiguration, three of the disciples **saw** without a shadow of a doubt, whom they were following.

As we come down off that mountain, we prepare to head into the season of Lent. The 40-day season is fashioned after the 40 days in the wilderness Jesus spent wrestling with the temptations of this world. One of those trials the Temptor placed before Jesus was the capacity for turning the myriad rocks around Jesus into bread to assuage his hunger. We are faced with so many forms of hunger, for which we seek a variety of solutions...many of which do not quench our need. If we enter Lent with discipline and intentionality, we can a) be courageous enough to name the hungers we experience, and b) seek the life changes necessary to bring us into fuller communion with who God made us to be beloved; with our neighbor; with our planet; and, with God. I love the sense of euphoria Peter seems to have during the Transfiguration. "Lord, we should build tabernacles, so we can prolong this experience." But Mark has it right - it isn't about reaching a mountaintop and staying there. That's not true to life. Life confronts us with so many chances to practice our faith. It's an on-the-go kind of thing. It is definitely a journey.

So, we conclude by returning to the words of William McElwee Miller, who reminds us that we have the necessities required in our journey of becoming God's beloveds:

bread, for nourishment; (Table)

water, for refreshment; (Font)

a book, for direction, (Bible), and

opportunity, for service. (The World)

These are *our* pilgrim fare. Jesus provided us with these things. *Let us* trust Jesus on *our* way.

One loaf...our bread for the journey...always sufficient.

Thanks be to God. Amen.