

## Transfiguration Sunday

Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

It is called the Iditarod. It is also called **The Last Great Race on Earth**. You can't compare it to any other competitive event in the world! A race over 1150 miles of the roughest, most beautiful terrain Mother Nature has to offer. She throws jagged mountain ranges, frozen river, dense forest, desolate tundra and miles of windswept coast at the mushers and their dog teams. Add to that temperatures far below zero, winds that can cause a complete loss of visibility, the hazards of overflow, long hours of darkness and treacherous climbs and side hills, and you have the Iditarod. **A race extraordinaire**, a race only possible in Alaska.

From Anchorage, in south central Alaska, to Nome on the western Bering Sea coast, each team of 12 to 16 dogs and their musher cover over 1150 miles in 10 to 17 days.

In 1925, part of the Iditarod Trail became a life saving highway for epidemic-stricken Nome. Diphtheria threatened and serum had to be brought in; again by intrepid dog mushers and their faithful hard-driving dogs.

The Iditarod is a commemoration of those yesterdays, a not-so-distant past that Alaskans honor and are proud of.

It has won worldwide acclaim and interest. German, Spanish, British, Japanese and American film crews have covered the event. It's not just a dog sled race, it's a race in which unique men and woman compete. Mushers enter from all walks of life. Fishermen, lawyers, doctors, miners, artists, natives, Canadians, Swiss, French and others; men and women each with their own story, each with their own reasons for going the distance.

It is this story that attracted four young adults that Robyn and I met last week at the Summer Dog Sled Camp in Juneau, Alaska. One young lady in her twenties told us that the Iditarod has been her dream since she was in grade school in New Jersey. That dream became reality when she moved with her family to Anchorage, Alaska. She started out with one dog. Now she has a team of 14 dogs she hopes to ready for this race in 2007. She and her fellow mushers give tours of the camp, their dogs and equipment. They live in tents right next to their dogs – some 100 dogs living in small box houses. The power of these dogs were demonstrated when they pulled a group of 14 adults and a 500 pound sled on wheels around the camp.

Mountaintop experiences are wonderful when they happen. They are called "peak experiences" for a reason! We see in the gospel reading today a peak experience. It is a dress rehearsal for Jesus. This time it is fisherman, taken to the limits of their understanding that are witnesses to one of the most spectacular events of Scripture - what we call the transfiguration of Jesus.

John Newton's hymn, Amazing Grace, fourth verse says, "When we've been

there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun. We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun." That verse describes the excitement and ecstasy of three mushers atop the Mt. of Transfiguration.

After the voice had spoken to Peter, James and John on the mountain what was left of their glorious vision was Jesus alone. Jesus stands alone. For all time - past and future, God's voice echoes with unmistakable certitude that Jesus of Nazareth is more than man and no less than the Son of God! No prophet, no philosopher, no spiritual master is left standing at the end of the day but Jesus! The glory of Moses revealed on Mt. Sinai, whose face shone forth the Shekinah of Yahweh, pales in the glory of the Son! The glory of Elijah, that lion of God, whose faith in battle vanquished the powers of evil prophets and wicked monarchs, pales in the Light of the Chosen, Christ Jesus!

Each week in the Nicene Creed we make our profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is "the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God...." Today's gospel clearly revealed Jesus of Nazareth as that only Son of God. Jesus reveals his relationship to God the Father by the transformation of his flesh into glorious light. Jesus is the One chosen by God to be proclaimed as Lord, receiving power to enter into the suffering and death that lie ahead. Jesus is the One chosen by God to be heard and to be listened. He is the One.

Jesus appears to be in consultation. His teammates, Moses and Elijah are brought together to affirm him. Both men led lives that pointed to Jesus, the Son of God. They discuss with him the events that are not yet. Moses the premier figure of the Hebrew Scriptures and bearer of God's covenant and leader of the Exodus appears on the mountain. His body was never found. Elijah, lion of Yahweh, the Prime Minister of prophets, who valiantly dueled with the political and religious establishments of his day also, made an exodus in a blazing chariot. And his body was never found. And soon Jesus would make his departure not to be found again in the flesh.

They discuss with Jesus his departure, literally the word is exodus. What kind of death will it be Jesus? Will you do this? Will you that? I can imagine Jesus saying, "Boys you won't believe it. Just wait and see!" These were matters that even the angels sought to understand.

It is tempting to try to understand Jesus' transformation into pure light. Though I only received a 'C' in college physics, I would love to armchair a discussion on God's demonstration of matter converted into energy on that mountaintop! Yet faith is not wrapped up in the secret of General Relativity or the nature of photons: The nature of light whether waves or particles is not a subject for faith. Here today, my task is to point you to the profound mystery of faith. We are invited to share in a peak experience. Here it is: "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

I can hear a pleading in those words of scripture - can you? "Listen to him! Please listen." These are the words of a wise Father pleading with his son's companions to listen deeply - not just with the mind but with the soul. God who designed our senses to be doubly endowed both in seeing and hearing, says,

"Listen!" The One who hides himself from our vision in the cloud so we can hear, says, "Listen!"

Hence the cloud of not knowing hid the Jesus of glory, so the disciples could hear the Jesus of Calvary! How do we hear Jesus? For those three who had heard all their lives that signs would accompany the arrival of Messiah, it was not hearing that mattered, but, "seeing in order to believe." Yet seeing a sign from God can prevent a person from hearing and obeying.

God knows how we think. Like Peter, we humans want to preserve those moments of glory. Who doesn't? It is human to want to enshrine our miracles. It is human to waste precious resources for our shrines that serve only to hide what can only happen in the heart. When we think too much and act too soon instead of listening as Peter could have, God sends a cloud to block our view.

In our voyage through the Aleutian Islands, Robyn and I saw many things of beauty whose view were hidden by glaciers, by forests, by other passing ships and by other passengers. Such beauty was waiting and we had to see with our own eyes the glory of God's handiwork others have reported to us. Yet we see through a glass that is darkened by clouds that distort and confuse our understanding of the beauty around us. Clouds of sin and stain enter our lives and prevent a clear view from the mountaintop.

"You are my Son my Daughter, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." That single verse has more to give to us than we could ask of God. You see, all of us need to know what God says about us. "You are my daughter, you are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased." I needed them in my life so badly just two years ago and I need them still today. Tomorrow there may be battles to fight! And I want assurance that God is with me to fight the forces of evil!

Perhaps the clouds are so thick right now in your life you can't see one foot in front of the other. It may be time to pause and cease activity. Quiet time to reflect, to pray, to hear what God is saying is paramount before taking one more step.

If dark clouds come your way may you come to see them in a new way. The clouds may be a way to protect you from what may be harmful. The cloud may be a sign it is time to trust, listen and follow. It can simply be a helpful reminder to close the eyes to the surrounding chaos in order to hear the symphony of the still small voice.

I envy Peter, James and John and their mystical experience. We like they are not given the option to stay on the mountain. If they stayed they would have become monks maintaining shrines for those looking for a glimpse of a former glory. But the Lord sends them down to do battle to scatter the darkness to spread light. We can do no less as descendants of Peter, James and John.

My sense is that God has for you at Trinity Church the things that eye has not seen, ear has not heard nor has entered into your minds what He has prepared for those who love Him! Like the three disciples who were lucky enough to be chosen to be on the mountain at the right time God has chosen you to bear a precious gift to share with others on their journey. A taste of glory, a foretaste divine is ours to paint such beauty for others that they may see and know the treasure they carry in jars of clay! Help them to listen! Teach them to pray!

Let us pray: O God, let them hear your voice and yours alone. May these many words of your servant only be channels of light where the eyes of faith may rest and see. Whoever is seeking you let each Christian here meet some one who hungers for the mountaintop. Protect us on our way and use us that they may see Jesus. And when at last the cloud is lifted from our vision on that mountain may your beloved people see Jesus, the Chosen, in whom, we are chosen sons and daughters. AMEN