

Last Epiphany A

Peter, James and John, get your head out of the clouds! How interesting! God's revelation to his people is a history about living in the clouds! God created a cloud for his people Israel to travel by day to the Promised Land. There was a cloud when God spoke to Elijah in the still small voice. God created clouds for his disciples before he spoke to them on the Mount of Transfiguration. Clouds hide the brightness of the sun. Clouds become a buffer between us and God – they hide what is too much for us to take in all at once.

Clouds are like the opening curtain that presents Act I. Without them the drama of God's revelation would be plainer much like reading the newspaper would be to the post modern man. The cloud can be a literary device that shifts our attention to what is coming next.

The disciples benefited greatly by a cloud. Their cloud screened the glory of God as the voice declared the Son-ship of the transfigured Jesus. The dazzling light of Jesus distracted them from their purpose of being with Jesus in silence. Overwhelmed by Christ's divine nature the three disciples didn't know how to respond so Peter suggests they undertake a building program on the spot where this revelation occurred. "Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from a cloud there came a voice...." It is human of us to want to build monuments to the relics we deem holy. It is human of us to want to distance ourselves from the living God and substitute an experience with wood and rock.

The cloud and the voice would get the disciples back on track. They came to realize they need not be afraid to draw near to God. The cloud was a type veil separating God's people from the holy of holies.

The Father-Son relationship indeed was a mystery that no one had ever before witnessed. The clouds that had overshadowed them and their spiritual ancestors were not something to run away from, or fear, or worry about, but with patience they would see and hear and believe!

The voice from the cloud came out from silence. They had to be still and maybe shaking a little while before God could get there attention. It was the same way with Moses. It wasn't until he ascended the mountain and he kept climbing into the clouds that God finally spoke. I believe that we most of the time must keep climbing until we hear the voice of God. Keep going up until you reach the

summit! Often we fall short of what God wants for us. Often we fall short of our own expectations because we don't want our ears to hear that says, "Listen to my son."

Natural theology and the doctrine of general revelation point to the concept that God has created and mapped the universe with signs that point Godward. These are God's footprints so people can track him and find him. Call it a sort of cosmic GPS. These are signs that *all people* can read. They are signs that won't save them, but should make them curious about God.

The two classic "signs" in the Scriptures are creation and conscience. The natural world points to a Designer (Psalm 19, Romans 1) and the human sense of right and wrong points to a Giver of moral conscience (Romans 2).

In homage to C.S. Lewis' popularization of these concepts, British theologian N.T. Wright wrote *Simply Christian*, offering what he calls "echoes of a voice." The echoes are desires resident in all of humanity which indicate that God has created them with longings. While people can't actually see the Speaker, they can hear the echo of the things which he has spoken into their souls.

Wright suggests four echoes in our culture: the universal appreciation of beauty, the longing for moral justice, the intrigue with spirituality of all forms and the need for human community.

Can we fix in our minds that image of the voice coming from the mountain. Surely, it would have startled most human beings. The mountaintop where clouds tend to gather and loom did not overshadow the light that the disciples saw come from our Savior that day. Yet the message of God's self-revealing did not come from the light but from those clouds that continued to loom around the disciples. The voice of God that once again, as it did at Jesus baptism, established the preeminence of Jesus as God's son, came out of the shadows. And the command was to listen to him!

Listen. What a wonderful command! If only we could stop. Stand still. Listen to the voice of God. How much better off we would be! How beautifully simple the life we are called to live as disciples would be. But we have our agendas. We get distracted by what others think we should do. We want to build when the voices in our heads simply say, "Climb." Climb into the mountain. Enter into the cloud and listen. May God bless us as we hear his voice, listen to his beloved Son and follow him. Amen!